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Paul's certainties, and  
other sermons







## PAUL'S CERTAINTIES



# PAUL'S CERTAINTIES

*AND OTHER SERMONS*

BY THE

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OF BOURNEMOUTH



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# I

## Paul's Certainties

*'I know Him whom I have believed.'*—2 TIM. i. 12.

*'We know that all things work together for good.'*—ROM. viii. 28.

*'We know . . . we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'*—2 COR. v. 1.

NO one can read the Epistles of Paul with any care without noticing in them a strange mingling of humility and assurance in the Apostle's references to himself. The language of self-depreciation and the language of self-assertion are both to be found in his letters. When thinking of himself in the light of his past, Paul can find no language too strong to describe his own utter unworthiness; but when he is defending himself against the attacks of enemies and detractors, he asserts his dignity and authority in language that sounds almost boastful and egotistical in its vehemence. For instance, in one place he describes himself as 'less than the least of all the saints;' in another he proudly flings out the challenge, 'Am I not an Apostle? Am I not

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free? Have not I seen the Lord?' In one place he is abased to the very dust, and speaks of himself as the 'chief of sinners;' in another he confronts his calumniators, and becomes, as he himself put it, as 'one beside himself' in glorying, and says, 'Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I more.' In one place he speaks of himself as the 'least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God;' in another place, in answer to his accusers, he says, with magnificent but justifiable egotism, 'I reckon that I am not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostle.'

Paul is a remarkable combination of humility and assurance; and this fact illustrates a similar remarkable combination in Paul's references to his Apostolic knowledge. Just as we find that strange mingling of lowliness and righteous pride when he speaks of himself and his work, so we find a remarkable mingling of diffidence and positiveness when he speaks of what he *knows*. In one place he speaks with a certain hesitancy; in another with dogmatic assurance. In one place he 'guesses at truth,' and bids his readers take what he says as his opinion merely, and not as Divine revelation; in another he speaks with the certainty of one who has the mind of Christ. In one passage he confesses that he knows only in part, and prophesies



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only in part; in other passages he states truths the most vital and important and profound, and introduces them with a bold and unhesitating 'I *know*.'

There are two words—familiar to all readers of Church history and modern controversy—which stand for two great movements, that from opposite sides threatened danger to the Christian faith. The one is the word *Gnostic*; the other is the word *Agnostic*. The Gnostic movement was a movement of the first and second centuries; the Agnostic of the nineteenth. The Gnostics were people who pretended to know more than the ordinary Christians, and who claimed to have penetrated further into the mysteries of the unseen and eternal world. Agnostics, on the other hand, are people who say they do not know, and *can* not know—who maintain, as one of their leaders put it, that the highest altar man can raise is to the unknown and unknowable God. The motto of the Gnostics of the first two centuries was, 'We know all things;' the motto of the scientific and philosophical Agnostics of the nineteenth century was the rather dreary one, 'Behold, we know not anything.' The Gnostics emphasized and insisted upon their *knowledge*; the Agnostics emphasized and asserted—sometimes with a strange and curious pride—their *ignorance*.

Now, from the Gnostic position, with its denial of mystery, and its invention of 'endless

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genealogies' to explain the secret things of God, and from the Agnostic position, with its denial of revelation, Christianity equally revolts. The true Christian position is represented by the Apostle Paul. Paul was both Gnostic and Agnostic. The realm of eternal truth was not a region of deep and impenetrable night, as the Agnostics would assert—there were certain things which were clear and manifest and certain, and of these things Paul could say, 'I know.' On the other hand, the realm of infinite truth was not a region from which all mystery had been banished, as the Gnostics claimed; there were certain things which God had kept within His own authority—and about these things Paul was quite ready to say, humbly and reverently, 'I do not know.' Paul, I repeat, was both Gnostic and Agnostic. There were certain things he *knew*; and there were certain things he did *not* know.

And in all this the Apostle Paul represents the true Christian position. There is a sense in which we are all of us Agnostics. Of many things we are constrained to confess ourselves ignorant. Agnosticism in this sense is not a nineteenth-century development, it is as old as the race. I find Agnosticism in the Bible not simply in the record of the inscription upon that altar in Athens which the Apostle saw, I find it in the sayings of some of the noblest and most eminent of the saints. 'Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O

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God of Israel, the Saviour,' says Isaiah. 'Clouds and thick darkness are about Him,' says the Psalmist. 'I go forward,' cries the passionate and almost despairing Job, 'but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him.' And, like those Old Testament saints, we are oftentimes constrained to confess that we cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection. There are experiences in life which we cannot understand; sorrows and trials that we cannot explain. Our Lord forewarned us it would be so. As He said to Peter long ago about the feet-washing, so He says to us to-day about many a hard and bitter experience, 'What I do *thou knowest not* now.'

All things are not plain to us. There are some which the Father has kept within His own authority. On these matters we are Agnostics. With regard to them we are constrained humbly to confess, 'We do not know.' But we are not Agnostics pure and simple. We are true Gnostics also. We may not understand the Almighty unto perfection—but we understand parts of His ways, and we know Him in His essential nature. We are not left to grope blindly in the dark; we are children of the light and of the day. If there are some things of which we are constrained to confess ourselves ignorant, there are other things of which

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we have immediate and certain knowledge. Our knowledge may not be complete—it *is* not complete; but so far as it goes, it is reliable and sure, and it is sufficient for the practical purposes of life—so that in the strength of what we know, we can bear cheerfully and bravely all that we do not know.

It was so exactly with the Apostle Paul. Of some things, Apostle though he was, Divinely inspired man though he was, he frankly confesses himself ignorant. 'For we know in part,' he writes in that incomparable thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians, 'and we prophesy in part;' and a little further on in the same great chapter he repeats his confession of ignorance in slightly different words, saying, 'Now we see in a mirror, darkly.'

But there were certain things of which Paul was absolutely certain, of which he was as sure as he was of his own existence; and in the strength of these great *certainties of the soul* Paul was able to bear his ignorance, and to live his brave, strenuous noble life. The 'I knows' of Paul make up a glorious list, a list which it would profit us all with the help of a concordance to study. Out of that splendid list take three—three of Paul's *certainties*; three truths of which he could say, not 'I think,' or 'I guess,' or 'I hope,' but of which he could say, in tones of most confident and unshaken assurance, 'I *know*.' These are the three:—'I *know* Him

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whom I have believed.' 'We *know* that all things work together for good.' 'We *know* that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

Looking closely at these great statements, I find that Paul is certain of these three things: (1) That he has an Almighty Saviour. (2) That he has a loving Father ruling and ordering his life. (3) That a happy home awaits him after death. On these points Paul is no Agnostic. He *knows* them; he is *persuaded* about them; he is absolutely confident. And these three great *certainties* enable him bravely to face all life's baffling mysteries and difficulties. Indeed, these three certainties seem specially designed to meet life's greatest and most painful mysteries. If I had to mention the three things that most utterly perplex and baffle us, I should mention these three: *sin, sorrow, death*. Notice how these three *certainties* seem specially designed to meet those three painful and saddening mysteries. There is the terrible mystery of sin; against that Paul sets the glorious certainty of the Almighty Saviourhood of Jesus Christ. There is the painful mystery of sorrow; against that Paul sets the glorious certainty of the Fatherhood of God, causing all things to work together for the good of His children. There is that last and most dread mystery of all, the mystery of death; against that Paul sets the blessed certainty of a happy home beyond the grave.

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I. Let us consider these great and glorious certainties for a few minutes further, one by one. This is the first. '*I know Him whom I have believed*, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' Here you come across one of the regnant convictions of Paul's life—one of those sovereign certainties which were the anchors of his soul—*his absolute assurance of the Almighty Saviourhood of Christ*. In Paul's day, as in our own, the most terrible and obtrusive fact in the world was the fact of *sin*. It was doing its deadly work on every hand. Paul himself has given us an appalling picture of the unspeakable and hideous ruin wrought by sin in the opening verses of his letter to the Romans. It polluted men's bodies; it defiled their minds; it destroyed their souls. It made the past a very nightmare; it made the present sheer misery; it filled the future with a nameless and terrible dread. Wherever Paul looked, he saw sin. The whole creation groaned and travailed beneath the burden of it. It was the source of all the world's woe and wretchedness and pain. It was casting men, body and soul, into hell.

And the vision of the world's sin would have driven Paul, as it drove some contemporary moralists, into bitter and angry despair, but for one thing—he *knew of One who could take sin away*. There were questions about sin that even

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Paul could not answer. He had a piercing intellect, a great and acute mind, and that he could wrestle magnificently with some of the darkest and most difficult problems of human destiny, the opening chapters of his great Roman letter bear ample witness. But the problem of sin was beyond even Paul's solution. The question how sin came to be at all, why a good and loving God should permit sin in a world He had made, not even Paul could fully answer. But while prepared to admit his ignorance as to the origin of evil, there was one thing Paul knew with an absolute and certain knowledge—he *knew Jesus Christ could save from it*. Yes, he *knew* that. He was absolutely *certain* of that, and he went throughout the world proclaiming it—preaching to the helpless slaves and victims of sin Christ and Him crucified as the power of God unto salvation. He passed from land to land and town to town, not discussing the philosophical problems connected with sin, but declaring a glorious and blessed fact, preaching the gospel of release to those in Satan's bondage held, proclaiming to the guilty and the sin-burdened and the vile that Jesus could save to the very uttermost those who came to God through Him. The Almighty Saviourhood of Christ was one of the sovereign certainties of Paul's soul.

*And his certainty was born of experience.* 'One thing I know,' said the blind man to his cross-examiners in the Gospel story, 'whereas I was

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blind, now I see.' Christ's power to give sight was not a matter of speculation or surmise to him. He *knew* it, because he himself had experienced it. In the same way, Paul's certainty of Christ's saving power was born out of his own experience of salvation. 'This is a faithful saying,' he writes, 'and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to *save sinners* ;' and then, as if to meet a question or doubt in the minds of his readers about a statement so audacious and unqualified as that, he adds this phrase for warrant and proof, 'of whom I am chief.' Paul's certainty of the Almighty Saviourhood of Christ arose from the fact that He had saved him. There could be no one in the wide world beyond the reach of the saving power of Him who had rescued the 'chief of sinners,' Saul, who before was a persecutor and blasphemer, and injurious.

And Paul's certainty extended not simply to a belief that Christ could *save*, but that He could keep. 'I know Him,' he writes, 'and am persuaded that He is able to keep.' Paul might have been puzzled to explain why it is sin is still allowed to haunt and plague the Christian. John Bunyan, in that great book *The Holy War*, is hard put to it to explain the presence of sin in the regenerate. But without stopping to discuss the question 'Why,' Paul knew *one* thing—that from all temptation and trials and assaults of the devil, Christ could keep. This again was no matter of guess-work with the



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Apostle. He had proved it by blessed experience. Listen to him in that glorious climax of one of the noblest passages of Holy Writ: 'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' And with that glorious conviction in his soul, Paul looked out upon a sinning world—a world lying in the evil one—with a cheerful heart. There were things connected with the question of sin that he did not understand. It was a terrible and awful mystery, this mystery of iniquity; but one thing he knew—he knew that Jesus Christ could save and keep.

And that is one of the great certainties that may be ours also. Here is one thing about which we need not guess, or think, or surmise, but which we may *know* with a sure and certain knowledge: we may know Christ as an Almighty Saviour. There is still much that is perplexing and mysterious about the whole question of sin. Volumes have been written about the 'Problem of Evil,' but I do not know that they have successfully solved the problem yet. If you ask me how sin came in at the first, if you ask me why sin is allowed to remain in a world which God rules, I shall have to confess, 'I cannot tell.' But one thing I know, taking the facts as they

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are, with this terrible and all-pervasive plague of sin in our midst, I know that Jesus Christ is able to save men from it. And that, after all, is the important and vital matter. It is interesting, no doubt, to know how a patient contracted a disease ; but the pressing practical question is, how to deliver him from it. It would be interesting to know how men at the first came under the bondage of sin and the law ; but the all-important practical question is, how men can be released from the bondage and thralldom in which they lie. And that we *know*. Yes, I repeat, that we know. 'We know Him, and are persuaded that He is able to save and keep.'

And I preach that glorious and *blessed certainty* with all boldness this morning. *Christ is able*. All history demonstrates it. Our own experience confirms it. 'He is able,' says Peter, the denier and blasphemer. 'He is able,' says Zacchæus, the cheat. 'He is able,' says the woman who was a sinner. 'He is able,' says the dying thief. 'He is able,' says Saul, the persecutor. 'He is able,' says Mark, the coward. 'He is able,' says Onesimus, the runaway. 'He is able,' says a great army of fornicators and idolaters, and adulterers and drunkards, and revilers and extortioners, who have been washed and sanctified and justified. And from the halls of heaven there comes to us a sound as of the sound of many waters, all the hosts of the redeemed praising the Lamb and

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saying, 'Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to set us before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power before all time and now and for evermore, Amen.' And backed by the testimony of all the saints and the witness of our own experience, I preach Christ able to save and keep—I preach this not as a guess or a perhaps, but as a matter of certain and absolute knowledge. I know and am persuaded that He is able to break every chain, to shatter every fetter, to save every man, to redeem every sinner, to save and to keep, and at last to set them without blemish perfect before the throne.

Is this one of your certainties? A lady once asked Sir James Simpson, the great Edinburgh physician, the discoverer of chloroform, what was the greatest discovery he had ever made. The great doctor looked at his questioner and said, 'Madam, the greatest discovery I ever made was the discovery that Christ was my Saviour.' Have you made that great discovery yet? Some of you groan and pant and languish beneath the load of sin. Have you discovered Christ is a Saviour yet? The discovery is waiting to be made. There may be doubts and questionings about other things, but this is a matter of absolutely certain knowledge—we *know* Christ is able to save to the uttermost, and to keep to the end all who come to God by Him.

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II. Here is the second great certainty of the Apostle's soul: '*We know that all things work together for good* to them that love God.' This again, with Paul, was not a matter of speculation or guess-work. He *knew* it. He knew that the events of his life were not the results of chance or accident, or blind fate; he *knew* that a wise and loving Father was ordering and ruling all things for his highest good. There was much that seemed most wrong in Paul's life. He had troubles and trials and sorrows that would have crushed most men. He was outcast from friends and home; he was afflicted all through life with some painful disease which he called his 'stake in the flesh'; in his self-imposed toil of preaching the Gospel, he was imprisoned, scourged, stoned, and at last he laid down his life at Rome. It was a hard, rough, painful life that Paul lived, a life full of trials and griefs and sorrows. And yet Paul never imagined that there was anything wrong. Behind the manifold afflictions that fell upon him—yes, *in* those afflictions—he knew there was a loving Father always thinking of him and caring for his best interests. And so Paul was, throughout his life, cheerful, buoyant, exultant. 'Rejoice alway,' he used to say, and he himself was a rejoicing Christian.

Not that he could understand the why and the wherefore of his trials, not that he could see the precise good each trouble was designed to

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accomplish, but he knew God was behind them all, and so he knew also that *all things were bound to work together for his good*. And this too is one of the *certainties of faith*. We talk of the mystery of sorrow and of pain, and great mystery it oftentimes is. Our wondering souls ask the question—Why? Why this sorrow? Why this bereavement? Why this waste of life? I am not overstating the case, am I, when I say that pain seems sometimes to be absolutely needless and wanton and cruel? When we see a man stricken down in the midst of his days; when we see a father removed just when the family want him most, or a mother taken while little children still need her care, we feel that we cannot understand it, we cannot account for it.

But though we may not be able to explain why trials like these come, or to understand them when they do come—yet one thing the Christian knows, and that is this—he *knows*, not simply guesses or hopes, but he *knows* that all things work together for good to them that love God. He *knows* that underneath him are the everlasting arms. He *knows* that God besets him behind and before, and lays His hand upon him. He *knows* that God orders his path and his lying down. ‘It seems all wrong,’ said one to me who was passing through the bitterest of sorrows—‘it seems all wrong, but I *know* it’s all right.’ ‘I *know* it’s all right.’ Yes, *we know* it is all right. We know our times are in the Father’s hands.

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‘And all is right that seems most wrong,  
If it be His sweet will.’

There it is, one of the sheet anchors of the soul in this life so full of sorrow and pain. ‘*We know* that all things work together for good to them that love God.’ Brethren, is this one of your certainties? Do you *know* it? Quietness and peace of heart are only possible to us as we *know* this! And it is waiting to be known. Where shall we attain to this blessed and glorious confidence? At the Cross of Jesus Christ. This is the challenge the Cross makes: ‘He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?’ The Cross spells love, infinite, boundless, unailing. Once you have realized the meaning and the power of the Cross—there may still remain a hundred things which are dark and doubtful to you; you may be still unable to understand the precise object of any particular trial, but this one thing you will *know*, with a certainty that admits of no questioning or suggestion of doubt, you will *know* that all things work together for good to them that love God.

III. And here is the third of Paul’s certainties. ‘We know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ The happy home in the Father’s house was no dream, or fancy, or imagination to the Apostle—it

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was a solid certainty. Socrates and Plato speculated as to what came after death—Paul **KNEW**. He knew that there was waiting for him 'a building of God, a house not made with hands.' And the gleaming vision of that eternal house robbed death of all its terror. Not, perhaps, that even for Paul all the mystery had disappeared. If you will read that marvellous fifteenth chapter in First Corinthians, you will see that there are questions about the next life which Paul cannot solve. When it comes to the question of the *modus operandi*, the utmost even Paul can do is to suggest analogies. But leaving the *how* to God, one thing Paul *knows*—he knows that the grave is not his destiny, but that there is waiting for him after death a building of God. And so the dread is removed from the grave, and Paul can look to the end with joyous anticipation, because 'to depart and be with Christ is far better.'

And this is one of the certainties of faith. The Christian does not *guess* at a hereafter; he is *certain* of one. He does not speculate; *he knows*. 'He *knows* he has a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' There may be things about death which he does not understand—but he knows this, that at death he does not cease to be, but passes into the immediate presence of the King, and takes his place in the Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all. And so to the Christian the grave loses its dread,

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and death its terror. In one of the illnesses of Mr. Sidney Cooper, the artist, the doctor said to him, 'Every one is asking how you are, Mr. Cooper.' He replied, 'It is very kind, but I am less anxious they should hear about my health than that they should hear that God has rescued me by the blood of His beloved Son for an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for me. I want every one to know that I am going to enjoy that inheritance with Christ.' Mr. Cooper had enjoyed a long and happy and prosperous life, but he was not loth to lay it down, for he *knew* that when the earthly house was dissolved, he had waiting for him a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

On these three great certainties let us rest. We do not know everything, and we never shall, till we know as we are known. But we know enough to enable us to face with brave and quiet hearts all the manifold experiences of life. We need not trouble ourselves about the refinements of theological speculation. These three great but elementary certainties supply us with a sufficient working creed. We know Him, and are persuaded He is able to save and keep. We know all things work together for good. We know that we have a building of God, a house **not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**



## II

### The Unaccountable Man

*'Whence hath this Man this wisdom, and these mighty works! Is not this the carpenter's Son?'*—MATT. xiii. 54, 55.

THE Nazarenes were dumfounded. They prided themselves upon being able to take the measurement of most men and things. But this time they were completely baffled; they had come across a phenomenon which seemed to defy explanation. They were clean at their wits' end. They did not know what to think. Their mental state was one of utter and hopeless bewilderment.

They had just been listening to a sermon. It was a sermon the like of which they had never heard before. It was separated by a whole universe from the thin, dry, dead discourses they were accustomed to hear sabbath by sabbath from their scribes. *This* sermon went direct to the heart. It soared the heights; it plumbed the deeps. It pulsed with life; it throbbed with power; it was instinct with self-evidencing truth, and it left the auditors in a state of bewildered amazement. 'Whence,' they

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said one to another, 'hath this Man this wisdom, and these mighty works?'

They had begun by wondering at the sermon; they ended by wondering at the *preacher*. 'Whence hath *this Man* this wisdom?' 'This Man' was the cause of their wonder and the source of their astonishment. Had the sermon come from the lips of the greatest rabbi in the land, it would have been a marvel, but coming from the lips of 'this Man' it was more than a marvel, it was a *miracle*.

For the Preacher was no stranger to them. He had lived amongst them as boy and man. They knew His home; they knew His people. For thirty years He had been one of themselves. For fifteen years of that time He had been a mechanic in their midst. He had helped to build the houses of some of them; He had made the furniture of others; He had mended the ploughs and harrows of others. It was only a few weeks since He had left the carpenter's shop and taken to preaching. This was His first visit to Nazareth after the beginning of His public career, and this was the first sermon preached in the hearing of His fellow-townsmen, and it left them in a state of astonishment verging upon stupefaction. 'Whence,' they said, 'hath this Man this wisdom?'

The astonishment of the Nazarenes, among whom Jesus had been brought up, was the greater because they knew all about the Preacher's home and upbringing. When we see a man endowed with special

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and unique qualities, we always try to account for them. And we look for the secret of these extraordinary qualities chiefly to two things: (1) to a man's *parentage*, and (2) to a man's *education*. Again and again you may read in the biographies of great men sentences like these? 'He inherited his strength of will from his father. He derived his gentleness of disposition from his mother.' Mental as well as physical characteristics descend from parents to children, and heredity supplies the key to many a man's character. In fact, since the idea of evolution has become one of our dominant intellectual ideas, we are almost inclined to think that every man's career can be fully explained by an investigation of his family history.

Next only to parentage in importance in the formation of a man's character is *education*. And I use *education* in a broad sense, including not only the means at his disposal for the training of his mind, but also the influences, the political, social, religious, intellectual influences that have played upon a man in the formative years of his life. The age a man lives in; the ideals and aspirations of his time; the teachers he comes in contact with—all these things go a long way towards the make-up of his character. And the Nazarenes thought of these things as they listened to the Preacher that day.

But the more they thought about His parentage and upbringing the more astonished they became.

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‘Is not this the carpenter’s Son?’ they said. ‘Is not His mother called Mary? And His brethren James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence, then, hath this Man all these things?’ There was nothing in His family history to account for His marvellous wisdom and power. His parents and His brothers and sisters, were plain Galilean peasants. They were known to the audience. They possessed no shining or extraordinary qualities.

Nor was there anything in His *education* to account for it. For every one in the synagogue that day knew that Jesus had been bred in a carpenter’s cottage, and had only received the education within reach of a peasant woman’s son. He had never gone to Jerusalem—like Saul of Tarsus—to sit at the feet of Gamaliel or some other learned rabbi. He had never gone, as we should say, to college or university. And yet here He was pouring out words of heavenly grace and wisdom such as they had never listened to before. And the Nazarenes were, I repeat, at their wits’ end. They did not know what to make out of it all. ‘Whence,’ they asked, ‘hath this Man this wisdom?’ Jesus was to them a mystery, an enigma, a portent. He was an *unaccountable Man*.

The impression produced by Jesus upon the Nazarenes was exactly the same impression as that produced by Him wherever He went. He

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struck every one as an extraordinary, unique, unaccountable Man. The general effect of the appearance of Christ was the creation of wonder and astonishment in the minds of those who saw and heard Him. If you will take up your Gospels you will perhaps be surprised to find how often we are told that the people ' marvelled ' or ' wondered ' or ' were astonished ' at something Jesus either said or did. And this ' wonder ' was not confined to any one class. Roman officials and great rabbis were every whit as much ' astonished ' as the simple and credulous peasants of Galilee.

Let us begin at the beginning. When He was twelve years old, Jesus went up with His parents to Jerusalem to the feast, and this is what I read about the impression produced by Him upon the great doctors of the law even at that early age : ' And all that heard Him were *amazed* at His understanding and answers.' I turn to His first great sermon, that sermon known to us as the ' Sermon on the Mount,' and this I find was the effect produced by His preaching : ' The multitudes were *astonished* at His teaching ; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.' I turn to John's Gospel, which records for us His Jerusalem ministry, and I find that the same effect was produced by His preaching in the capital as was produced in the provinces. ' The Jews therefore  *marvelled*, saying, How knoweth this Man letters, having never learned ?

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All classes shared in this 'astonishment.' Friend and foe alike experienced it. Pharisees and Herodians came one day in order to catch Him in His words, and this was the result of the interview: 'They  *marvelled*, and left Him, and went their way.' A palsied man was once carried into His presence, but walked away with his bed upon his back, insomuch that they were all  *amazed*, and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw it on this fashion.' He was in the way going up to Jerusalem one day, and His disciples were  *amazed*, and as they followed they were afraid. He stood, a friendless and lonely prisoner, before Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, one day, but such was the effect of His demeanour upon that hard and cynical official, that we are told 'the governor  *marvelled*.'

Amongst all classes and sections of the people Christ created a feeling of  *wonder*. The doctors were 'amazed ;' the multitudes were 'astonished ;' the disciples 'wondered ;' the governor 'marvelled.' Jesus everywhere created the impression that He was unique. Men could not, on ordinary lines, explain Him. He suggested questions which none could answer. 'Whence hath this Man this wisdom, and these mighty works?' 'How knoweth this Man letters, having never learned?' 'By what authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority? Whence art Thou?' He was a mystery, a puzzle, an enigma to them.

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From the human standpoint, He was to everybody in Palestine, from the humblest peasant in Galilee at the bottom, to Pontius Pilate the governor at the top, an 'unaccountable Man.'

Now, I want to go a step further still, and say, that the wonderful phenomenon Jesus appeared to the Nazarenes, and what He was to the people of Palestine generally, *that* He is to the men and women of to-day. Starting from the purely human standpoint, Christ is to this day the world's *unaccountable Man*. Every one else can be explained and accounted for, but Christ remains the mystery and marvel of the world. Many great men have appeared in the course of the world's history. There have been great thinkers, like Socrates, and Plato, and Aristotle, and Kant, and Hegel. There have been illustrious poets, like Homer, and Æschylus, and Virgil, and Dante, and Shakespeare, and Milton. There have been marvellously gifted artists, like Phidias, and Apelles, Michael Angelo, and Raphael. There have been great statesmen and rulers and conquerors, like Pericles, and Alexander, and Cæsar, and Cromwell, and Napoleon. These men were *great* men—they were supremely gifted men. They tower above the ordinary level of humanity as some great Alpine height, like the Jungfrau does over the valley that nestles at its feet.

And yet, while we admire the greatness of these men, we are not puzzled or bewildered by it.

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They were great men, but still they were *only* men after all. They can be explained; they can be accounted for. Socrates' power of thought, Shakespeare's command of language, Raphael's witchery of colour, Napoleon's mastery of men,—they are tremendous gifts, but we know that they all lie within the compass of the capabilities of human nature, and we by no means despair of seeing a thinker greater than Socrates, a poet greater than Shakespeare, an artist greater than Raphael, and a conqueror greater than Napoleon.

But the case is wholly different when we come to Jesus Christ. He is not to be classed with the great men. If *they* are removed from us as some Alpine peak from the valley at its foot, at any rate they spring from the same earth. But He is as far from them and from us as the stars are from the Jungfrau's summit, and He belongs, not to the earth at all, but, like the stars, is a denizen of another sphere. Christ is to-day the wonder and amazement of the world. He stands confronting it, as He stood confronting the Nazarene congregation nearly nineteen hundred years ago; we hear His words of grace and wisdom, and we still ask ourselves in astonishment this question: 'Whence hath this Man this wisdom, and these mighty works?'

Christ refuses to be classed, and cannot be accounted for as you account for ordinary men. The attempt has been made again and again and



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again. Perhaps the most famous attempt was made by Strauss, the German scholar, in the last century. He wrote a *Life of Christ*, in which he professed to account for Christ, and to explain Him. He stripped the wonder and the mystery and the marvel all away. The book created a great stir at the time, and many proclaimed that at last the riddle had been solved. But men soon found out that Christ was infinitely greater than Strauss' account of Him. Strauss himself found it out; his pupils found it out, and the result has been innumerable 'lives of Christ' since the one which was supposed to have settled the whole question.

Christ casts His spell over succeeding generations of scholars, and one after the other undertakes the task of accounting for Him, but no account has yet been given which has satisfied the human heart. They are one after the other tried in the balances and found wanting. And to this day Christ remains the *unaccountable Man*, the Sphinx of history, and all those who approach the study of His life from the humanitarian standpoint, find themselves confronted and challenged by this insoluble riddle: 'Whence hath this Man this wisdom, and these mighty works?'

Let me call your attention to one or two particular features in the character of Christ which the Jews could not account for, and which remain unaccountable to this day.

I. Consider the *wisdom* of Christ. 'Whence hath

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this Man this wisdom ?' The Jews had their great rabbis, like Shammai and Hillel, but the wisdom of Shammai and Hillel was as dust and dross compared to the wisdom that fell from the lips of Jesus. How was it that a village Carpenter was able to surpass the wisest of the ancients? How came it that their most learned doctors were mere children in their knowledge of Divine things compared to this peasant Preacher? Whence hath this Man this wisdom?

The same question ever confronts us, for the years have not lessened the wonder of the wisdom of Christ. Confessedly Jesus was the wisest Teacher who ever lived on earth. Not only was there none among the Jews, but there has been none among the teachers and prophets of the world to compare with Him. Morality and religion find their highest and perfect expression in the words of Jesus. And that question challenges us, and we are bound to face it—'Whence hath this Man this wisdom?'

The world has been blessed with many great and wise teachers. I will give the name 'prophet' not simply to Mahomet; I will give it to the great sages of the East, Confucius and Buddha; I will give it to the great philosophers of Greece, Socrates and Plato. But when men class Jesus Christ as a teacher with Socrates, they are simply ignoring and glozing over the facts. I will say nothing of the fact that Socrates enjoyed all the advantages of Athenian culture in its palmyest days, while Christ

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hailed from despised and neglected Nazareth. I will take the teaching of the one and compare it with the teaching of the other, just as they stand, and I repeat there is a whole world of difference between the two.

To begin with, in the teaching of the wisest of the Greeks you will find superstitious falsities. The old idolatry of the Greeks finds its place in his pages. But in the wisdom of Christ you find no trace of superstition or falsity or error. Then, again, the wisdom of Socrates is to a large extent out of date. The world has outgrown it. No one would dream to-day of taking Socrates' maxims as a rule of conduct. No one would dream of taking Plato's Republic as his ideal of a model state. We have outgrown these things ; they belonged to the child ages of the world's history, and like all childish things, they have been put away.

But Christ's words to this day embody our highest ideas of wisdom. To them men turn as the one and only rule of conduct. Not one jot or tittle of them has grown obsolete or out of date. There they stand, so charged with Divinest wisdom, that even a sceptic like John Stuart Mill admits that he knows no better way of attaining to a noble character than by so living as that Jesus shall approve the life. And I want to know, how do you account for it all ? Whence hath this Man this wisdom ? How is it that the Carpenter of Nazareth is divided by a whole universe from the

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wisest of the Greeks? How is it that, while the wisdom of other ancients is mixed with the dross of folly and has become obsolete and out of date, the words of Jesus are pure gold and remain to this day, charged with spirit and life? Whence hath this Man this wisdom? If you start from purely humanitarian premises, that will be a puzzle you will never solve, and Christ will remain for all time to you an *unaccountable Man*.

II. Consider, in the second place, the *authority* of Christ. 'They were astonished at His teaching,' we read, 'for He taught them as one having *authority*.' Yes, that is a mark of the teaching of Christ—He speaks with authority. Turn to the Sermon on the Mount, and you will see what I mean. He speaks in that sermon with the highest claim of royalty. He undertakes on His own responsibility to correct Moses—to amend, improve enlarge, abolish that law which was given by the mediation of the angels, and whose veriest letter was sacred in the eyes of the Jews. He abolishes this sacred, holy, and revered law, and substitutes for it a law of His own. 'Ye have heard it has been said by them of old time, Thou shall not kill; but *I* say unto you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but *I* say unto you, Resist not evil.'

In all the world's literature I can find no record

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of any one taking upon himself to do what Jesus did. Other sages argue to their conclusions—*Jesus issues laws*. Others suggest—*Jesus commands*. Socrates considered that his only claim to the title, ‘wisest of the Greeks,’ lay in the fact that he was the most conscious of his own ignorance. You will find no hint or suggestion of ignorance in the teaching of Jesus. He speaks about the deepest things—about heaven and hell and God—in the unfaltering, unhesitating tone of One who has perfect and absolute knowledge.

And this ‘authority’ which Jesus takes to Himself, conscience freely and gladly admits. As Dr. Dale says, we do not argue the matter out, but we perceive, instinctively and intuitively, that Jesus is our Moral Ruler, that He is the Lord of our moral and religious life. We feel towards Him as we feel to no other teacher in the world. We discuss the conclusions of other teachers ; we *submit* to His. And this attitude is not confined to those who have been taught to regard Christ as Divine. Even when men from non-Christian countries are brought face to face with Jesus, they find in Him an authority to which they are constrained to submit. And the question confronts us again, ‘Whence hath this Man this authority ? Or who gave Him this authority ?’

It was not the authority of office, for He held none ; it was not the authority of consummate learning, for He was only a Carpenter. How came

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this Man by this authority? How is it that millions of men bow the knee to Him? How is it that the universal conscience admits and ratifies His most daring claims? The question challenges you, and must be answered. 'Whence hath this Man this authority?' Starting from purely humanitarian premises, Christ's authority will remain for ever an insoluble mystery, and Christ Himself an *unaccountable Man*.

III. And, lastly, let me speak a word about the 'mighty works' of Christ. 'Whence,' said the Nazarenes in their bewilderment, 'hath this Man this wisdom and *these mighty works?*' The 'powers' of Christ astonished them as much or even more than His words. For Christ not only spoke wonderful words, but He also wrought the most wonderful deeds. His 'powers' (for that is the literal meaning of the words translated 'mighty works') created astonishment and wonder wherever He went.

The like had never been seen by men before. After the healing of the palsied man, we read, 'They were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.' After an exercise of His power over Nature, the disciples said one to another in speechless wonder, 'What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the waves obey Him?' So startling were these 'powers,' these mighty works of Christ, that even His foes felt compelled to account for them, and they

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resorted to the desperate expedient of accounting for them by saying that it was by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, that He cast out devils.

And Christ still confronts the world and challenges it to account for Him. He healed the sick, He cleansed the leper, He cast out devils ; He gave speech to the dumb ; He gave sight to the blind ; He gave life to the dead ; and that question faces us and demands an answer—How came Christ by this wondrous power ? Whence hath this Man these mighty works ?

But some may object that the whole question of miracles is more or less doubtful, and that, therefore, it is unfair to take the Gospel miracles for granted. Very well, let us leave the Gospel miracles out of account, though I believe them to be as much historical facts as the battle of Waterloo. But by omitting the New Testament miracles you do not dispose of Christ's 'works.' The mightiest works of Christ are not those which He did during the two or three years of His public ministry. The 'mightiest works' of Christ are those which He continues to-day in our own midst—in the way of saving, restoring, redeeming men. It was a great thing to give eyes to the blind ; it is a greater thing to open a man's eyes to the beauty of holiness. It was a great thing to make the lame to walk ; it is a greater thing to make the morally halt to run in the way of God's commandments. It was a great thing to heal the leper ; it

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is a greater thing to cleanse a man from the hideous leprosy of lust. It was a great thing to bring up Lazarus from the grave, but it is a greater thing to quicken men who are dead in trespasses and sins.

And these *greater things* Christ has done through the centuries and is doing still. He saves, redeems, emancipates, and delivers men. He rescues an Augustine from his lust, and a John Bunyan from his profanity; a Francis from his worldliness, and a J. B. Gough from his drunkenness. Since the world began it was never heard that a man was 'saved' by Plato or by Socrates. But there are ten thousand times ten thousand ready to affirm they have been 'saved' by Jesus Christ. We have ourselves known men who have been 'saved' by Him. There are men in this church ready to witness that they have been saved by Him. Whence hath this Man—I put it to you—these mighty works? How do you account for it, that of all the sons of men He alone has been able to deliver men from the fatal grip of appetite and passion? How is it other men have not been able to do it? Whence hath this man these mighty works? I repeat again, if you start from the humanitarian premiss, Christ's mighty works present to you an insoluble enigma, and Christ Himself is an unaccountable Man.

There is but one way of accounting for Jesus Christ, for His wisdom, His authority, His mighty



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works, and that is by accepting the verdict of the Church throughout the centuries, that in Jesus we have the only begotten Son of God, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. That explains everything. People tell me that it is hard to believe in the divinity of Christ ; it is harder still *not* to believe in it. For not to believe in it leaves Christ a riddle, a portent, an inexplicable phenomenon. But to believe that God was in Christ is to understand His wisdom and His authority and His power to save even to the uttermost. The divinity of Christ is to be, not a dry dogma, it is a demand of the reason and of the heart.

And if Christ be divine, what is your attitude towards Him? You perhaps remember that beautiful essay of Hazlitt upon ‘Persons one would wish to have seen.’ It is really a record of a conversation between Lamb, and Hazlitt, and Ayrton, and other friends. One night when they were together somebody started that topic, ‘Persons one would like to have seen.’ Many names were mentioned—Sir Thomas Brown, the author of *Urn Burial* ; Chaucer, the father of English poetry ; Dante, the great Florentine ; Pope, Dryden, Oliver Cromwell, and so on, and so on. Then Lamb wound up the conversation with this remark, ‘There is only one other Person I can ever think of after this.’ Everybody knew whom he meant, though he did not mention our Lord’s

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name. 'If Shakespeare was to come into the room, we should all rise up to meet him ; but if *that Person* was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of His garment.' That person is here ! Oh that you may have grace to fall down and kiss the hem of His garment, and say with Thomas of old, 'My Lord and my God !'

### III

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*‘Who do men say that the Son of man is?’—MATT. xvi. 13.*

IN the New Testament Jesus Christ has many and varied titles applied to Him. Just as our King, in addition to his first and leading title, has all sorts of subsidiary dignities, so that the full recital of all his honours makes up quite a lengthy catalogue—so exactly I find on consulting the Subject Index of the Bible that some sixty-eight different titles are applied to Jesus Christ by the various writers of the New Testament. Here are some of the most familiar of them—Lamb of God, Good Shepherd, Friend of Publicans and Sinners, Son of David, Son of God.

Each of these titles is an index to our Lord’s character; each is a key to the great treasure-house of His nature; each sets forth some aspect of His Person or work. The name ‘Lamb of God’ brings before us His great sacrificial work, and reminds us how He bore our sins and carried

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our sorrows. The name 'Good Shepherd' reminds us of that individualizing care which knows each sheep by name. The name 'Friend of Publicans and Sinners' reminds us of a love that stoops to the outcast and the guilty and the vile. The 'Son of David' reminds us of ancient prophecy and Messianic hope. The name 'Son of God' reminds us of His special relationship to the Eternal Father and His union with the Divine.

A special importance attaches to the title 'Son of man,' and for this reason—*it is the title our Lord chose for Himself*. It was, shall I say, Christ's favourite name. No one else applied it to Him. For with the solitary exception of Stephen's cry before the Sanhedrim, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God,' it is never used save by Christ Himself. But He used it constantly. While those with whom He came in contact applied to Him the titles of honour, majesty, and dignity, this was how He loved to designate Himself, 'Son of man.' Dr. Sanday describes it as 'the really characteristic title which occurs some eighty times in the Gospels, and is without doubt the one which Jesus chose to express His own view of His office.'

In our Lord's conception of this title, it was certainly Messianic. But to the people who heard Christ use it, it conveyed no Messianic suggestion, with the result that the use of the name rather veiled than revealed His Messiahship. I am

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not going to discuss at length the origin of the title. Westcott stoutly contends that the title is an absolutely new one, our Lord's own creation. Most scholars, however, maintain that the name was suggested by that passage in Daniel, where it is written: 'I saw in the night visions, and behold one like to the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days.' Knowing our Lord's reverence for Scripture, His fondness for quoting Scripture precedent, we may well believe that the name may first have been suggested to Him by that passage in Daniel. But while believing that, Westcott's contention remains substantially true. In our Lord's use of it, the name became a new name. He borrowed the phrase, but He put into it an absolutely new content. For the name associated in Daniel with ideas of dominion and glory and a kingdom, as used by Christ is associated with ideas of meekness, humility, and low estate, for it was the chosen name of One who had not where to lay His head.

But passing by the questions as to the origin of the name, let me go on to ask, What did this title 'Son of man' as used by Jesus imply?

I. *Christ's Real Humanity.* This title asserted our Lord's *full and real humanity*. It emphasized our Lord's *intimate and vital connection* with our race. 'The Word became flesh,' says John in the first chapter of his Gospel, making in those four simple words the most stupendous declaration ever

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submitted to human thought. When the Apostle penned that tremendous sentence, he was but translating into speech the truth implicit in this title our Lord chose for Himself, 'Son of man.'

We are perhaps more familiar with difficulties about Christ's divinity than we are with difficulties about Christ's humanity. And yet in the early centuries it was Christ's humanity that was the trouble. The earliest heresies were gnostic heresies that denied that Christ was truly man. One set of gnostics held that the body of Christ did not belong essentially to His nature, the Messiah descending upon Him at baptism leaving Him before death; another set held that the body of our Lord was a mere appearance or illusion; while yet a third set held that it was a heavenly body. All these views destroy the true humanity of Christ. Against all such theories this title asserts Christ's real and true humanity. The connection between Him and the race was not accidental and arbitrary; it was organic and vital. He was not a heavenly visitant here simply; He was not a stranger from another world sojourning for a while with an alien race; He belonged to the race among whom He sojourned. He was bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh. He was the *Son of man*.

The *real humanity* of Christ is a fact that no one who reads the Gospels with any care can possibly miss. He had the same *bodily feelings*

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*and affections* as we have. We read of Him in the Gospels as being *hungry* and *thirsty* and *tired*. 'When He had fasted forty days,' we read in the story of the Temptation, 'He was afterwards an hungred.' On the cross He cried, 'I thirst!' 'Jesus being wearied with His journey,' we read in the fourth chapter of John, 'sat thus on the well.' And **not** only had our Lord a body and bodily feelings and affections like ours, but He had also a *mind and mental experiences* like ours. When our Lord took flesh He submitted to the limitations of the human mind. He thought just as we think. He learned just as we learn.

We find this hard to realize. We assume, I think, unconsciously that, being a Divine Person, our Lord must always have known everything. When we find Him asking questions we take it for granted that it was not to gain information Himself, but rather to draw out the persons to whom He was speaking. But such an interpretation makes the whole story of the Gospels a make-believe. It is to make our Lord's intercourse with men as unreal as a stage play. When our Lord came to the fig-tree, expecting to find figs upon it, He did not know, any more than Peter or John knew, that, as a matter of fact, the tree bore nothing but leaves. When He asked Philip how many loaves they had, He asked because He did not know. When He asked the man possessed of devils his name, when He asked the father of the demoniac

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boy how long the lad had been possessed, He asked for information ; the questions were not make-believe ; the ignorance was not assumed. Jesus asked because He did not know.

It is perfectly true that in other passages we find Jesus credited with marvellous and piercing insight. He knew, we are told, what was in man. But that does not and cannot invalidate the facts quoted to prove the limitation of our Lord's knowledge. Indeed, He himself asserts in precise and definite terms His own limitations. 'Of the day and hour,' He said, 'knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, *neither the Son*, but the Father only.' Jesus did not during His earthly sojourn possess Divine omniscience. When He became man He submitted to the intellectual limitations of men. He was a real man—having not only a human body, but also a human mind. Then again He is revealed to us as sharing in the ordinary emotions of human nature. He marvels ; He is surprised ; He is touched with compassion ; He is grieved ; He is angry ; He is moved with indignation ; He is tempted. 'He was made in all things like unto His brethren.' He was as real a man as either you or I. Human affections, emotions, feelings, powers—He knew them all. He was the *Son of man*.

So this title which emphasizes His real manhood, inferentially asserts our *brotherhood*. It brings Christ near to us. It makes Him one of the family.



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When the Stephenson centenary was being celebrated with considerable ceremony and pomp in Newcastle-on-Tyne, in the great procession of crafts and trades that proceeded through the streets of that northern city, there marched a little group of colliers from Wylam, George Stephenson's birth-place. And they carried in front of them a banner with this inscription, 'He was one of us.' And that is what this title says to you and me about Jesus Christ. We can say of Jesus as those northern colliers could say of Stephenson, 'He was one of us.'

Perhaps the tendency has been to emphasize the difference between us and Christ ; to magnify the distance that separates Him from us. Art has encouraged that tendency, for painters have been in the habit of painting our Lord with a halo—a ring of light about His head. They have pictured Him as Divine rather than as human. But there was no halo round Christ's head ; the only halo that ever surrounded Him was the halo of holiness and truth. He was as true a man as Peter or John. He used the hammer and the chisel and the saw as any joiner in our town did yesterday. He had the workman's hard and often grimy hand. He hungered, thirsted, grew tired, slept, ate, wept, rejoiced, was glad, was sorry, just like you and me. He was 'one of us.' He was the Son of man.

And of all names our Lord bore, perhaps this that

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asserts His kinship with us is the most grateful and welcome. He has other titles more lofty and more majestic than this. He is Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting God, the Prince of Peace. But those great names seem to remove Him far from us in our low estate. But this title puts Him at our side again. 'He is not ashamed to call them brethren,' says the Apostle. No; for He chose to call Himself 'the Son of Man.' He deliberately chose the title that proclaimed His kinship, the name that put Him on our own level. We can make a friend, a brother of the Son of Man. He is one of us.

'For Mercy has a human heart,  
Pity a human face,  
And Love the human form divine,  
And Peace the human dress.'

II. *Christ's Ideal Humanity*.—But this title Son of Man,' which asserts our Lord's true manhood, asserts also that His was a *complete, perfect, and ideal* manhood. He was not only *a* man; He was *the* man; in a very real sense the one true full man the world has ever known. For notice the exact phrasing of the title. Christ does not speak of Himself as *a* Son of man among other sons of men. He is *the* Son of man. He is the one and only person who can be denominated *the* Son of man. In the lips of any one else the name would be a blasphemy. In His, the name is perfectly appropriate and fitting. For He summed up

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humanity in Himself; He was the flower and crown of the race; He was the totality and aggregate of human nature; the ideal, representative man. Let me speak of Christ the ideal, representative man under these four heads: (1) His completeness; (2) His universality; (3) His timelessness; (4) His sexlessness.

(1) First of all, let me say a few words about the *completeness* of Christ. The best of ordinary men are partial, one-sided, and imperfect. Their very greatness is fragmentary and incomplete. If they have one set of virtues, they are lacking in another. They have, as we say, the defects of their qualities. They are in the condition of those Greek marbles you may see in the British Museum. As they stand there are hints and suggestions of beauty and grandeur about them, but they are lopped, maimed, and imperfect. They are not complete figures, they are mere torsos. Take the circle of the Apostolate to illustrate what I mean. The various Apostles are distinguished for various excellencies. Peter has enthusiasm; James has courage; Andrew has meekness; Thomas has sacrificial devotion; John has the love that soars. All the Apostles have their several excellences, but not one of them has them all.

But Jesus combines in Himself all the qualities that abode severally in His disciples. He had Peter's enthusiasm, James' daring, Andrew's meekness, Thomas' sacrificial devotion, John's soaring

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love, only in superlative degree. The pure white ray unites seven colours in itself. Let it fall upon a prism, and it at once splits up into red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The relation between any one of these constituent colours and the pure white ray may serve to illustrate the relation between ordinary men and Christ. I look at one man and I find him the quality of strength; I look at another and I find in him the quality of gentleness; I look at one and I find in him a piercing intellect; I look at another and I find in him a loving heart. But I look at Jesus and I find in Him strength and gentleness, courage and tenderness, intellect and heart all united in their highest perfection. The human virtues which are the constituent colours are so blended and combined in Him as to form the white ray of a complete and perfect life.

Jesus Christ is the one complete, full, all-round Man. Every quality dwells in Him. If I wanted an example of meekness, I would not go to Moses for it; I would go to Jesus Christ, the meek and lowly in heart. If I wanted an example of patience, I would not go to Job for it; I would go to Jesus Christ 'who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.' If I wanted an example of consuming pity, I would not go to Jeremiah the weeping prophet for it; I would go to Jesus Christ, who, when He came near to the

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city, wept over it. If I wanted an example of supreme wisdom, I would not go to Solomon the wisest of monarchs for it ; I would go to Jesus Christ, who spake as never yet man spake. If I wanted an example of soul-absorbing zeal, I would not go to the Apostle Paul for it, I would go to Jesus Christ, to whom the crowds applied the prophetic word, 'The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up.' And if I wanted an example of burning, flaming love, I would not go to the Apostle John for it ; I would go to his Master, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Jesus Christ combines in His own character the virtues found singly in other men. He is Moses, Job, Solomon, Jeremiah, Paul, John, all in one. He sums up all things in Himself. Other men are partial. He is complete. He is 'the Son of man.'

(2) Secondly, let me ask you to notice the *universality of Christ*. And by that I mean, that though Christ was born a Jew, He is not Jewish. Christ is absolutely free from local and national limitation. Born in Judæa, He belongs to the world. In this He is an absolute contrast to other men. Ordinary men are parochial and national rather than universal. Every nation has its own characteristics, and those characteristics mark, yes, and mark off its people. Who has not felt all this when travelling abroad ? We cross the Channel yonder, and at once we feel some subtle barrier divides the Frenchman from us and us from the Frenchman. It is not language

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simply—but tradition, history, temperament, genius, and point of view. There are men who aspire to be ‘cosmopolitan’—to become what Goldsmith termed ‘citizens of the world.’ But it is as hard to divest oneself of national prejudices and limitations as for the leopard to change his spots.

The consequence is the great men of any particular country do not appeal to people of other lands as they do to those of their own. Shakespeare, for instance, could never have sprung up in France. He is the very incarnation and expression of Elizabethan England. Victor Hugo could not have come into being in England; he is French in form and diction and idea. Or to take another illustration not from literature. Both England and France at certain stages of their history handed over their destinies to the control of military dictators. But, as Bishop Chadwick says, Napoleon would have been absolutely intolerable in England, while Cromwell would have been ridiculous in France.

The greatest of men are the children of their land. They are parochial, not universal. But it is not so with Jesus Christ. Nothing peculiarly Jewish runs through any word or institution of His. There is no need to make any allowance for the Oriental bent of mind. He speaks to us in our English Bible to-day. Has any one of you detected a foreign accent in His speech? Oh no! He speaks to us in the language in which we were

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born. And what is true of us is true of all men. Jesus is a 'foreigner' to no one. He speaks the universal speech because He unites all qualities in Himself. Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman—Jesus is at home with them all, belongs to them all; is brother to them all. He is the *Son of man*. He belongs not to Judæa, but to the world. Hence it is that the gospel about Christ and Him crucified is the power of God unto salvation to *every one that believeth*. Hence it is that they shall come from the north, and the south, and the east, and the west, and sit down together in the kingdom of God.

(3) Thirdly, let me draw your attention to the *timelessness* of Christ. It is another aspect of the same truth which I have just been emphasizing under the head of the universality of Jesus. As Jesus belongs not to one land, but to *all* lands; so does He belong not to one age, but to *all* ages. There is the quality of timelessness and eternity about Him and all His speech. Ordinary men are children of their own day and generation. Their thinking and speech reflect the thought and speech of their own time. And as a new generation grows up the men of a former generation are superseded and out of date. They tell me that it takes only some twenty-five years, for instance, to make a scientific book wholly antiquated and obsolete. Nobody dreams

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nowadays of making text-books in geography, economics, history, theology, science, philosophy of books that were published three or four centuries ago. They were all right in their own day, perhaps ; but they are absolutely out of date in ours.

Jesus was born twenty centuries ago, but He is not out of date. No one has proposed to supersede Him. You have to make no allowances for His day. His speech is modern speech. His truth is modern truth. His speech is for all time, and His truth is for all time, because it is eternal speech and eternal truth. He is the same yesterday, to-day, yea, and for ever. Time does not touch or affect Him. He speaks to us with the same immediacy and power as He did to the crowds who gathered on the slope of the Galilean hill. He is the Son, not of His age—He is the Son of man in every age.

(4) Fourthly, let me say a word about what with diffidence I venture to call the *sexlessness of Jesus*. A word will explain what I mean. We draw a sharp line of distinction between the manly and the womanly—between the masculine and feminine virtues. But human nature does not mean masculine nature only. Human nature embraces man and woman, the masculine and feminine. And that full human nature, combining the manly and the womanly, the masculine, and the feminine, you find in Jesus Christ. It would have been



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only a segment of human nature that would have been represented in Christ had He been marked by what we call the masculine virtues only ; He stands for full-orbed, perfect human nature because He combines in Himself the feminine with the masculine.

What are the characteristic masculine virtues? Shall we say strength and courage? Where could you find a more magnificent illustration of strength than in our Lord's cleansing of the Temple? or of courage than when He set His face to go to Jerusalem? What are the characteristic feminine virtues? Shall we say tenderness and sensibility? Well, where can you find a more moving illustration of tenderness than in our Lord's blessing of little children? or of sensibility than when, as her brazen accusers clamoured out the sin of the woman taken in adultery, our Lord bent His head for very shame, and began to write upon the ground? Our Lord was not masculine only, He was feminine also. He combined the qualities of man and woman in Himself. He was the Son of Man in the broad sense. He was the totality of human nature.

It is at our peril we ignore the feminine in Christ. Mariolatry—the worship of the Virgin Mother—is simply the protest against the neglect of the womanly in Christ. Emphasize the masculine qualities—His strength, boldness, courage, and men will inevitably turn to the Virgin Mother,

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for they want tenderness as well as strength. But there is no need to turn to the Virgin Mother, for Christ unites in Himself with the strength of a man the tenderness and gentleness of a woman. And thus in virtue of His completeness, His universality, His timelessness, His sexlessness, our Lord Jesus becomes the ideal Man, the representative Man, the Son of Man, the Second Adam, the head and crown of the race.

Because Christ is the Son of man in the broad sense, because He belongs to every age and every country, because He sums up all humanity in Himself, He is a perfect sympathizer. Christ's power to sympathize springs from His true humanity. Christ's *universal* power of sympathy springs from His *universal* humanity. If He had been a Jew, He might have been unable to sympathize perfectly with us here in England ; had He been a child of the first century, He might have been unable to sympathize with us in this twentieth century ; had He possessed masculine qualities only, He might have been unable to sympathize perfectly with womanly cares and griefs ; but because He is universal and timeless, and because He unites man and woman in Himself, He is able to sympathize with men and women of every age, and rank, and country, and station.

Who is this Son of man ? Who is this Person—complete, universal, and timeless ? This is no

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ordinary man. This is no common man. Thus the name of His humiliation becomes, when we begin to think of **it**, the name of His exaltation. For who can this ageless, universal, perfect Man—this man who sums up all things in Himself—be but the Son of God? And if He be the Son of God, what are you going to do with Him? ‘Who do men say that the Son of Man is?’ Jesus asked. And Peter answered, and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ God give you grace, brethren, to make the same great confession, that to you as to him may be given the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

## IV

### The Death of Christ

*'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.'*—  
1 COR. xv. 3.

THERE are some passages of Scripture which it seems almost sacrilege to criticise and discuss. Analyzing them is like analyzing your mother's face to see what it is that makes that face to you the fairest in all the world. And amongst such passages which are almost too sacred to be analyzed, surely the story of the Passion stands forth pre-eminent. One cannot help feeling that in presence of the Cross we had better worship and adore, and without note or comment let the 'old, old story' make its direct and irresistible appeal to human hearts.

But while on the one hand we feel the story of the Passion is almost too holy and sacred to be discussed, on the other hand we feel constrained and compelled to discuss it. Throughout the whole of the New Testament the Cross is so placed in the forefront, so much is made to depend

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upon it and flow from it, that we are under the intellectual necessity of seeking to discover what it was Jesus did for men when He 'hung and suffered there.' In a word, the central position the Cross occupies in the Gospel constrains men to seek to 'understand' it, and to construct theories to explain the great transaction that was accomplished upon it.

There are those amongst us who tell us we ought to be satisfied with the *fact* of the Atonement without attempting to formulate theories about it. But that is an absolutely impossible and intolerable position, amounting as it does to a practical repudiation of the intellect. There is no fact in the world without its theory, and we cannot and dare not leave the most stupendous fact of all a 'blank unintelligibility.' We are told the Cross is intimately, vitally connected with the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of the soul. We simply cannot help asking 'How?' 'Why?' In other words, we want a theory to account for the fact. The Cross was never meant to be a puzzle, a baffling, hopeless mystery. 'There may be,' as Dr. Denny says, 'depths in it that we cannot fathom, just as the Divine nature itself has; but it will not be unintelligible any more than God Himself is unintelligible; if God is more fully present in it than in anything else in the world, it ought to be of all things the most luminous and the most susceptible of rational treatment.'

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I believe the Cross is to be understood. I believe the New Testament itself treats the Cross as something to be understood. Dr. Horton says in his essay on the Atonement, and he underlines the statement for purposes of emphasis, 'The New Testament has no theory about the Atonement.' Now, that statement is only true if you put a hard and narrow and very limited meaning upon the word 'theory.' That the New Testament does not contain a treatise upon the doctrine of the Atonement is true, but that it furnishes no explanation of what happened on the Cross is *not* true. No one can read the Epistles of Paul or Peter or John without seeing that these Apostles have all of them certain beliefs about what happened on Calvary's Hill. Indeed, the opening chapters of the letter to the Romans form practically a discussion of the rationale of Atonement, and to none of the Apostles is the Cross a 'blank unintelligibility;' none of them rest satisfied with the bare fact; the Cross to all the New Testament writers is charged with meaning and significance.

Let us attempt to gather up some of the main teachings of the New Testament about the meaning of the death of Christ. Before, however, we commence the discussion, I must make two provisos: (1) First, what I have to say does not profess to be a complete account of the Cross. One of the most serious mistakes Christian

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theologians have ever made has been their readiness to claim completeness for their own particular theory. The moral, the federal, the governmental, the representative, the substitutionary theories of the Atonement have all had their advocates. The Christian Church would have been spared many a painful controversy if the advocates of these various theories had recognized that the one did not necessarily exclude the other. The fact is, the moral theory sets forth one aspect of the truth; the federal sets forth another; the substitutionary another; the representative sets forth another. But the Cross embraces them all. Yes, the Cross is greater than them all put together. We may have a true and valid experience of the love of God, and yet in its height, and depth, and length, and breadth it passes knowledge. We may have real insight into the meaning of Christ's death, and yet the Cross is greater than our vision of it.

‘We ask and ask: it smileth, and is still  
Out-topping knowledge.’

(2) And, secondly, before we can understand the Cross at all, we must approach the study of it in the fitting spirit. When Paul preached the Cross of old, it was a stumblingblock to the Jews, while to the Greeks it was mere and sheer foolishness. And still to men of a certain spirit the Cross is an offence. ‘Now, the natural man,’ writes the Apostle in an earlier chapter of this letter to the Corinthians, ‘receiveth not the things of the Spirit

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of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged.' And above all things else the Cross is to be spiritually judged. To the natural man it is a superfluity; it is foolishness. To appreciate the Cross we need the broken and contrite heart. We need a keen and vivid sense of our own sin. He will see the Cross most clearly; he will see furthest into the depths of its meaning who gazes upon it through the blinding rain of his own penitential tears.

First of all, let me call your attention in just a word to the *central place the Cross occupies in the New Testament*. 'All the light of sacred story,' says Sir John Bowring, 'gathers round its head sublime;' and so it does. It is the centre of gravity of the New Testament. For proof of what I say, you need but turn to the Gospels and notice the space the Evangelists devote to the account of our Lord's Passion; you need but turn to the Acts and the Epistles and read the account of the Apostolic preaching. Look at my own text. 'I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received,' says the Apostle Paul, writing to his Corinthian converts, 'how that Christ *died for our sins*, according to the Scriptures.'

'First of all.' This took first rank; this was Paul's primary and central message. This had priority and precedence over every other proclamation. From this, as from a fountain, all his Gospel



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flowed. '*First of all . . . Christ died for our sins.*' 'First of all'? Yes, and 'last of all' too. It was the sum and substance, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of Paul's preaching. For I turn to the second chapter of this same Epistle, in which he gives a more detailed account of his preaching in Corinth, and this is what I read: 'For I determined not to know anything among you, save Christ and *Him crucified.*' Yes, the Cross was central and primary in all Paul's preaching. Upon it he concentrated all the emphasis of his message. 'First of all . . . Christ died for our sins.'

And it was not Paul alone who gave the Cross this central and primary place. In doing this he was only following the example of the other Apostles who were in Christ before him. You have but to turn to the Epistles of Peter and John, and to the record of the Apostolic preaching in the Book of the Acts, to see that the other Apostles placed the emphasis exactly where Paul placed it. Indeed, in this very paragraph from which my text is taken Paul asserts that identity in emphasis in set and definite terms. This was no message which he had himself invented, which Paul preached to the Corinthians. He delivered to them only what he had received. In preaching as he did he was at one with Peter, and John, and James, and the rest. 'Whether it be I or they—so we preached, and so ye believed.'

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So *we* preached. And how was that? '*First of all*,' that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. I need not labour the point, need I? The Cross is central to the New Testament. It is the primary fact. It forms the very heart of the Christian message. '*First of all*, Christ died.' And in so far as in our preaching and teaching we shift the centre of gravity from the Cross to something else, to that extent we depart from New Testament and Apostolic precedent and practice.

Now, what was it that the Apostles saw in the Cross which led them to give it this supreme and central place in their preaching?

I. They saw in it, first, *the final and consummate Revelation of the Divine Love*. The gospel the Apostles had to preach to the world was, above all things else, a 'gospel of grace.' That was the burden of their message. 'The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation.' And what is grace? Well, 'grace' stands for the stooping, condescending, unmerited love of God. And that was the gospel the Apostles had to proclaim to men—the gospel that God loved them with a deep, strong, free, and infinite love. And for final proof of the reality of that *love* they pointed to the Cross. Love could no further go than that. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and to assure wayward, perverse, and sinful men of His love for them He made the supreme and final

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sacrifice—He suffered, bled, and died for them. Pilate wrote a superscription over the Cross to this effect : ‘ Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.’ But the Apostles wrote another superscription over the Cross of Christ. It is written in a thousand tongues, and this is how it reads : ‘ GOD IS LOVE.’ The Cross, I say, is the supreme and final revelation of the Divine Love. All the Apostles see *love* in it. ‘ Scarcely,’ writes the Apostle Paul, ‘ for a righteous man will one die ; for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’ Notice the collocation, ‘ God commendeth His love.’ How? ‘ Christ died for us.’ ‘ Herein is love,’ says the Apostle John—here is love at its best and finest and purest—‘ not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins.’ Notice again the collocation, ‘ God loved us, and sent His Son.’ The sending of His Son to be the Propitiation for sin was the final proof of God’s love. Yes, the Cross stands for love—love whose depth we can never fathom, and whose strength we can never measure ; love so deep and strong that it constrains us to sing—

‘ Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my strength, my life, my all.’

It is upon the revelation of the Divine Love

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made on the Cross that the advocates of the moral theory have fastened. I believe their theory to be inadequate to the facts, but so far as it goes it is literally and beautifully true. That is the subduing, overwhelming message of the Cross—'*God is love.*'

I believe there is a tendency in many minds to assume, at any rate tacitly, a certain antagonism between God and Christ. They picture Christ as interposing by His sacrifice to mollify and appease an angry and offended God. There is a picture in one of the Continental galleries which depicts God as shooting arrows at men, and Christ catching them and breaking them before they strike. The idea that underlies that blasphemous picture lurks in the minds of many Christians.

But the Scriptures give no shadow of warrant or support to any such idea. God and Christ in Scripture are always at one. From beginning to end the work of Christ was the work of God Himself. Far from needing to be propitiated, God Himself provided the Propitiation. Far from being an angry God who needed to be appeased by the sacrifice of Christ, God Himself sent forth Christ in love to die. God was *in Christ* on the Cross. The Cross is proof, not of Christ's love only, but of the Father's love too. There is no divorce. 'The Son of God loved me,' says Paul, 'and gave Himself for me.' And in another place he says, '*God* commendeth His own love, in that

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while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' It was the love of God that sent Christ into the world. God so loved the world that He gave. Back of the great sacrifice stands the grace of God. It all originated there. The Cross is the final and consummate proof of the Father's love.

II. And, secondly, the Apostles saw in the Cross the *Divine judgment upon sin*. 'For what the law could not do,' says Paul in one of the profoundest passages in that profound letter of his to the Romans, 'in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh;' or rather, as the Greek puts it, 'executed judgment upon sin in the flesh.' And what was the judgment God executed upon sin? Death; and such a death—the *death of the Cross*! The Cross was God's judgment upon sin! I am not at this moment claiming any vicarious virtue for Christ's death. But just because He identified Himself with man, shared his lot as a sinful being, He had to share in the judgment of sin, and that judgment you see on the Cross. And in forming your estimate of what that judgment was, do not confine your attention to our Lord's physical suffering.

In the current Evangelicalism there has been far too much made of the bodily distress, and far too little of the spiritual anguish. We have talked, for instance, about the 'blood' as if the 'blood'

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itself constituted the efficacy of the sacrifice, instead of realizing that the blood is only the symbol of the outpoured and sacrificed life. And so, in thinking of the sufferings of Christ, it is upon the physical suffering we have concentrated our thought. But it was not the physical suffering that constituted the awfulness of the Cross. Probably in the matter of physical torment the two thieves suffered more than Jesus. It was the spiritual anguish our Lord passed through that made His death so awful. Go back to Gethsemane and read how He began to be exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and how He fell into such an agony that His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. Read on until you come to that point where the deep darkness settled on His soul, and He cried, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Who can plumb the depths of that woe? And that was God's judgment upon sin.

'The wages of sin is death,' says the Apostle. And what does death mean? Not the mere ceasing of physical existence, for in that sense we all die—saint and sinner alike. What, then? Well, for explanation of that term 'death,' you must go to the Cross. Jesus 'died' for sins. He submitted to become forsaken of God for sin. That is death—not the mere ceasing to breathe, but homelessness, forsakenness, the deep night. And Christ endured all that. He died, and that

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'death' was God's judgment upon sin; God's testimony to the enormity and heinousness of sin. In His own Son, God pronounced judgment upon sin in the flesh.

One of the most deplorable characteristics of our day and time is the decay of the *sense of sin*. We have treated 'sin' as if it were a light thing. 'Sin!' said a French critic; 'I have abolished sin.' There are verses in the Bible, those solemn verses which speak of 'the wrath of God,' which are rarely, if ever, referred to now; while 'hell' is by multitudes regarded as an exploded superstition. But ignore those solemn and austere verses as we may, sin is not a light thing. It is a terrible, an awful thing. Its enormity and horror it is impossible to exaggerate. And there is nothing we want more than to see sin as God sees it.

And whither shall we go to realize the enormity of sin? To the Cross! 'Gazing thus, *our sin* we see!' It is not merely that in the crucifixion of the Just One we see what human wickedness is capable of. But the Cross itself is God's judgment upon sin; it represents God's estimate of sin; it is God's everlasting testimony against sin. Sin is so awful a thing, that the only wages meet for it is *death*. Jesus identified Himself with us. He took our sins upon Himself; Jesus '*died*'—tasted all the bitterness of forsakenness and homelessness. Do you want to realize what sin is, my brother? Come and stand before the Cross. What brought

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Jesus there? Sin. Sin a light thing? It laid the Cross on Christ! Sin a trivial thing? Christ had to die to deliver us from it! Yes, come and stand before the Cross of Christ; in that Cross God passed judgment upon sin. There, if anywhere, the cry will well up from your heart and break from your lips, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.'

III. Thirdly, the Apostles see in the Cross of Christ *the ground of pardon and forgiveness*. The New Testament writers all agree in making the death of Jesus Christ the ground of our forgiveness and acceptance with God. There are great difficulties in the way of giving an intelligible reason why this should be so, but there can be absolutely no doubt that this is the plain unequivocal teaching of the New Testament. The Apostles all agree that when Jesus died on the Cross, He did something for us which enabled God (I know this is crude language, but all language that seeks to deal with such high and sacred themes must appear crude)—which enabled God, I say, to forgive sins and bestow upon men eternal life.

And what was that something? In some wondrous way, He took the consequences of our sins upon Himself. Listen to the various ways in which the Apostles state this stupendous fact. 'He died for our sins,' says Paul in the text; 'He was delivered for our offences,' he says in another place. While in two passages he waxes very bold



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and says, 'He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him;' and again, 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.'

And Peter speaks to the same effect. 'Christ also,' he writes, 'hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.' 'Who His own self,' he writes in another place, 'bare our sins in His body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed.' 'Ye were not redeemed,' he writes yet again, 'with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.' And John bears the same testimony. 'He is the Propitiation for our sins,' he writes, 'and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.' We are 'loosed from our sins,' he writes in another place, 'by the blood.' 'Hereby,' he writes in a third place, 'perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.'

There is but one conclusion from all this—Jesus Christ, on the Cross, in some wondrous way took our place—the Just suffered for the unjust; He bore our sins; He was made sin for us; and the result is we are 'loosed from sin;' we obtain the redemption, even the remission of our sins; we are brought to God; we are made the righteousness of God in Him. Yes, brethren, on the Cross

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Christ died for us—died that death of ours which is the wages of sin. ‘The doom fell upon Him, and was exhausted there,’ as our hymn puts it :

‘Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood ;  
Sealed my pardon with His blood.  
Hallelujah !’

The Gospel story seems to succeed or to fail very much as this vicarious suffering of Christ is present in it or absent from it. You have heard the story of the Moravian missionaries to Greenland. For years they toiled in Greenland teaching the natives about the Creation and the Fall, the Flood and the Dispersion, and so on, and all to no purpose. But one day John Beck read to a small company of them the old story of Christ’s dying love. And one of them, Kayamak, with tears streaming down his face, said to him, ‘Tell it me once more, for I too would be saved.’ At last they had found the key to the Greenlanders’ hearts.

And what happens in Greenland happens everywhere. In a little book entitled *Gospel Ethnology*, the author shows by a careful comparison of missionary enterprise for the past 170 years, that what has been most effective to pierce through the callousness and prejudices of heathenism has been the story of the Cross, the sufferings of the sinless Saviour proclaimed to men as the means of their pardon and acceptance with God. And what is seen abroad in heathen lands is seen also here at

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home. When we want to win men, what do we do? We get back to the old story. In the great Simultaneous Mission preachers put the Cross in the forefront. They knew that Christ crucified was the power of God.

And the vicarious sacrifice of Christ is the only thing that meets the deepest needs of the heart. It is at the Cross where Christ died—the just for the unjust—that men, like Christian of old, find pardon and release. A minister learns much in the course of his ministry. I have learned something about the needs of the human heart. I left college with practically little conception of the Atonement beyond that which the moral theory supplies. I saw in the Cross the supreme revelation of love. I was called one day to see a woman who was supposed to be dying. She was what the world would call a good woman, but she was in terror. I tried to tell her, as best I knew how, of the love of God. I talked to her about the Father being ready and waiting to welcome His child. But it was to no purpose; I went again and again, and all my speaking brought her no comfort. At last, in sheer despair, I told her the story of the Cross as my mother used to tell it me as a child. I told her how Jesus suffered in our stead; how He bore our grief and carried our sorrows, and how the Lord laid on Him the iniquities of us all. And do you know, brethren, where all my talk about the love and fatherhood

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of God had failed, the old story brought perfect peace.

It was a revelation to me. But it was, as a matter of fact, no uncommon experience. The saintliest of men have at the last come to rest absolutely on Christ's finished work. 'I am a great sinner,' said Dr. Lindsay Alexander, 'but Christ is a great Saviour.' In this verse the great Bishop Butler found peace: 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners;' while on Hugh Price Hughes' coffin there were these lines written—they expressed the root-faith of his soul—

'Nothing in my hands I bring;  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.'

Do you ever 'forefancy your dying bed,' as old Samuel Rutherford would say, and ask yourselves what will be your confidence then? I do sometimes, and I always get back to where that poor woman whom I visited twelve years ago came. I have seen a picture which shows a Cross erect, while a strong sea lashes and surges all about it, and clinging to the Cross there is a woman half drowned by the waves, yet clinging to the Cross as her only chance of safety. And that is what I will do—I will cling to the Cross.

'A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,  
On Thy kind arms I fall;  
Be Thou my Strength and Righteousness,  
My Jesus and my all.'

## V

### Sin and Grace

*'But where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly.'*—  
ROM. v. 20.

THE text suggests a battlefield ; it tells of a conflict that has been proceeding since time began, which is proceeding now, which is proceeding everywhere, which is proceeding in our own hearts. It mentions the combatants. The combatants are *sin* on the one side and *grace* on the other, and the prize for which they fight is the soul of man.

Sin and grace, according to the Apostle, are both of them tremendous energies. Sin, in these solemn and magnificent chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, is more than an act ; it is more than a condition ; it is a *power*. Paul personifies sin, and speaks of it as dwelling in man, reigning over him, using his members as instruments of unrighteousness, enslaving him, and, working through the commandment, slaying him. Sin, according to the Apostle, is a terrible enemy, who corrupts men's

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souls, smites them with cruel wounds, and drags them down to death and hell.

But sin is not left to work its deadly will upon men unchecked. Over against sin and opposing it stand *grace*. And *grace*, too, according to the Apostle, is an *energy*. Grace, in its central and essential meaning, stands for the undeserved, unmerited love which God has shown towards sinful men. But that love is no mere limp and placid sentiment, it is a mighty force; it is a veritable tide of power, working ever for the healing and emancipation and redemption of man. And of these two forces, sin and grace, the one working for man's ruin, the other working for man's redemption, the saving and redeeming force is the stronger. 'Where sin abounded, there grace did abound more exceedingly.'

The statement of the text accounts for the brave and invincible hopefulness of the Bible. It accounts for the fact that Christianity is a *gospel*, that it is good news, that it is glad tidings. The Bible does not shut its eyes to sin and its ruthless and destructive power; but opposed to sin it sees *grace*, and grace, it proclaims, is mightier even than sin. There is nothing about the Bible more noteworthy and characteristic than its stubborn and almost obstinate optimism. G. F. Watts has pictured Hope as a shrinking, blindfolded female figure with just one string left on her broken harp. But the Hope of the Bible is young and strong,

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and his eyes are like stars, and his face like the sun shining in his strength, and with bold and vigorous hand he strikes full and exultant chords from a harp that has not lost a string. The Bible never doubts but that clouds will break ; never dreams, though right be worsted, wrong will triumph ; holds we 'fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake.'

Of all the people in the world, the Christian is the only one who has a right to be cheerful. Other people—as witness the literature of our day—oppressed by the world's sin and woe, go through life with burdened hearts, but the Christian is 'merry' through it all. 'Rejoice alway,' said the Apostle Paul. The utmost pagan philosophers ever attained to was a certain stoical calm ; mirth, a high cheerfulness, was beyond their attainment. But 'rejoice alway,' said the Apostle, and he himself fulfilled his own precept. He rejoiced alway. He came into close contact with the deadly sickness and sin of the world ; he saw it in all its naked hideousness ; he has given us a picture of it in the first chapter of this letter to the Romans, that eclipses in its terrible realism and lurid horror anything that Juvenal ever wrote. And yet this man, who saw so clearly and had seen so much of the world's wickedness and woe, this man who had felt the pressure and burden of human sin, this man who had dwelt in lustful Antioch and pagan Ephesus and notorious Corinth, cities that were

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Satan's very seat, went through life with a singing heart and a shining face.

He rejoiced alway. For he saw more than sin at work. Yes, even in Antioch and Corinth and Ephesus he saw more than sin at work ; he saw grace at work as well ; he saw *grace* at work amongst the pleasure-seekers on the banks of the Orontes, grace at work amongst the Diana worshippers of Ephesus, grace at work amongst the profligates and harlots of Corinth, and when he thought of the omnipotent energies of God's grace he said to his own soul, and he said to his fellow labourers when cast down, 'Be of good cheer. Where sin abounds, there grace doth abound more exceedingly.'

The Bible does not arrive at its radiant hopefulness by ignoring any of the unpleasant and distressing facts of life. It notes them every one. If it were not paradoxical, I would say that the Bible arrives at its *optimism* by way of *pessimism*. There is a certain type of optimism which is utterly superficial and shallow and worthless. There are people who prate in gay and airy fashion about everything being as it should be in the best possible of worlds, simply because, like that ancient king who refused to allow a man in sackcloth to come within his line of sight, lest he should be led to think of sorrow and death, they live in a fool's paradise, and decline to come face to face with the woe and wretchedness of men. I would like to



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give men of that flippant type a month in a London slum. I would like to make them live the life of the poor. I would like to sentence them to live in a hovel ; to sleep as the poor do, herded together like swine ; to live as the poor do on a wretched crust. I would compel them to come into direct contact with the sin and misery with which the world is teeming, and beneath which it is groaning, and they would talk about everything being as it should be in the best possible of worlds never again.

The pessimism of Thomas Hardy and the author of *The City of Dreadful Night* is nobler and truer to the facts of life than this shallow and ignorant optimism. Indeed, in its view of human life the Bible sides with the pessimist. Search your Ibsen, or Thomas Hardy, or James Thompson through, and you will find nothing in them more sad and sombre than the statements of this old Book. Listen to this from Paul : 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now' Listen to this from John : 'The whole world lieth in the evil one.' Listen to this from Isaiah : 'The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it ; but wounds and bruises and festering sores.' Nowhere will you find statements more expressive of the world's wretchedness and woe than these. In its view of the facts of life, the Bible sides with the pessimist.

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But the Bible, for all that, is not a pessimistic book; its dominant note is not that of melancholy or despair; through its pessimism it emerges into a calm, confident, and courageous optimism. It sees the 'sin' as Thomas Hardy sees it; but it sees more than he does, for not only does it see *sin*, it *sees* grace as well, and strong though the destructive power of sin be, the healing and redeeming power of *grace* is mightier still. 'Where sin abounds, grace doth abound more exceedingly.'

'Where sin abounds,' says the Apostle. 'Well, where does sin abound? In you, brethren, and me, and every one. Sin is universal. Sin 'abounds.' Sin is a disease from which all men suffer. When an epidemic breaks out in a town, they at once isolate the patient. In London during the recent small-pox scare they carried off the victims to special hospitals. They were able to isolate because the stricken were, after all, only a minority. But when it comes to sin, you cannot isolate, for we are all of us smitten with the plague; we are all of us stricken with the disease; we are lepers all; sinners all; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. 'Sin abounds.'

But over against the universality of sin I will put the universality of God's grace. 'Where sin abounds, grace doth abound more exceedingly.' There is a power as ubiquitous and more mighty than the destructive power of sin, and that is the healing and redeeming power of God's grace.

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Abounding sin, more abundant grace. That is the mark of 'grace' in the Bible ; it is abounding, lavish, free. Paul talks, in his letter to the Ephesians, about the 'riches of His grace.' 'In whom,' he says, 'we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to *the riches* of His grace, which He made to *abound* toward us in all wisdom and prudence.'

And in the next chapter he writes, 'That in the ages to come He might show *the exceeding riches* of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.' Notice the words. It is as if Paul strains language to describe the wealth of God's grace. 'The *riches* of His grace which He made to *abound*.' 'The *exceeding* riches of His grace.' *Abounding* riches, *exceeding* riches—riches, so to speak, more than enough, in excess of the demand and the need. There is no fear of exhausting the supply. There is 'grace' enough and to spare. Wherever sin is to be found, grace is to be found also. Wherever sin has gone to steal and kill and destroy, grace goes to restore and heal and redeem. 'There is grace to cover every sin.' Abounding sin, more abundant grace.

'Slow to anger,' says the Psalmist, 'and *plenteous* in mercy.' With the text as my warrant, I am almost prepared to say you can come to the end of God's anger, but you can never exhaust or come to the end of His mercy. His anger endureth but for a moment, but His mercy endureth for ever.

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Plenteous in *mercy*! This mercy is a mercy that reaches to all, that saves all, that redeems all. Yes, I preach this gospel this morning to men and women in whom sin abounds; to a world in which sin abounds, I preach the gospel of a super-abounding mercy, of an over-abounding grace. This grace despairs of none, declines none, rejects none. 'Whosoever cometh, I will in no wise cast out.' Sin abounded in Zacchæus the publican, but grace did abound more exceedingly. Sin abounded in the poor harlot, but grace did abound more exceedingly. Sin abounded in the dying robber, but grace abounded more exceedingly. And therein lies our hope. Over against this sin which has smitten us all, and which goes everywhere to corrupt and to destroy, there is a grace—the omnipotent grace of God, which also goes everywhere to heal and to save—which is only waiting to redeem us all. Abounding sin, over-abounding grace.

'Thy goodness and Thy truth to me,  
To every soul abound,  
A vast unfathomable sea  
Where all our thoughts are drowned.'

And now let me pass on to speak of the effects of sin and the overcoming power of grace.

I. And first I call your attention to what Henry Drummond calls the *stain* of sin. What a stain it is, deep, dark, apparently ineffaceable! Not a mere fleck, not a mere spot on the outside that

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with patience can be rubbed away, but a stain that runs through every part of our nature. 'Keep yourselves *unspotted* from the world.' But not only have we not kept ourselves unspotted, from head to foot we are all filthy and unclean. 'Our best righteousness,' as the prophet says, 'is but as filthy rags.' 'Wretched man that I am!' cries Paul, 'who shall deliver me from this dead body?' He was standing aghast at the stain of sin in himself!

'But my original and inward pollution,' says John Bunyan in that great book, *Grace Abounding*, 'that was my plague and my affliction. Sin and corruption, I said, would as naturally bubble out of my heart as water would bubble out of a fountain. I thought now that every one had a better heart than I had. I could have changed heart with any body. I fell, therefore, at the sight of my own vileness, deeply into despair.' Bunyan was standing appalled by the stain of sin. And that is stain no human agency can obliterate. All the perfumes of Arabia will not do it. 'Though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much sope, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God.' 'Thine iniquity is marked'—the stain remains.

The stain remains—is that the last word? No; for over against sin with its terrible stain I have to set a more abundant and efficacious grace. And grace can *cleanse* the stain. I read in the

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vision of the seer that he saw a multitude whom no man could number, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands, standing before the throne of God and the Lamb. And the angel said to him, 'These that are arrayed in the white robes—these people without blot or blemish—who are they, and whence came they?' And the seer could not tell. So the angel answered his own question, 'These are they who came out of the great tribulation, and they *washed their robes*, and *made them white* in the blood of the Lamb.' They had not been always as they were then. They had washed their robes and made them white. They were sinners who had lost the stain! And they had lost it in the blood of the Lamb.

We can lose it in the same way still. 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' Jesus Christ, the gift of God's grace, can eradicate the stain. He will begin the work here, He will perfect it yonder. 'Vile and full of sin we are'—that is abounding sin. 'We shall be like Him—holy, harmless, undefiled, for we shall see Him as He is'—that is the more abundant grace.

I would like to say a word about lost and wasted days and years—the days and years spent in folly and sin. What of them? Sin abounded in them. Can grace do anything for them? Now, brethren, I know well that time can never be recalled, we never pass the same way twice, and yet I am

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loth to say with Drummond that the stain caused by years of sin is a stain that can never be effaced, and that the mischief done is mischief that can never be mended.

I have a firm belief in an over-abounding grace; in a grace that not only counteracts sin now, but by its very overplus of energy repairs the mischief sin has done in former days, in an energy of grace that makes up for the past and recovers it. You can see what I mean in what grace did with Paul; in what grace did with John Bunyan; in what grace did with J. B. Gough. It not only enabled them to resist sin; it raised them to such a pitch of zeal and enthusiasm as to make up for lost years and regain them. Men have raised barriers against the ocean, and so recovered submerged lands from the dominion of the sea. And so grace has enabled men to recover ground from the submerged past. 'I will restore to you,' says the prophet Joel, 'the years that the locust hath eaten.' Sin devours the years and destroys them, but God in His mercy restores them, enables us to reclaim and recover them. 'Sin abounds, but grace doth much more abound.'

II. And now let me speak of the *power of sin*. You have only to read these chapters to know something of the *power* of sin. Paul uses a variety of figures, but they all serve to describe the tyrannical and grinding power of sin. He speaks first of all of sin dwelling in him, taking up its

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abode in his heart, as if it were its proper home, in fact, taking possession of him. He speaks in another place of being 'servants of sin,' or rather 'bond-slaves' of sin, fettered and chained by sin, as were those poor slaves about whom I have been reading in Livingstone's journal, by the neck-piece, and the chains which secured them in their journey to the coast. While in the seventh chapter he speaks of being 'sold under sin,' so absolutely under sin's tyranny and power that he could not do the things that he would. 'The good that I would,' he cries, 'I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise.'

And that is no fancy picture of the awful power of sin. Sin takes men captive and makes slaves of them, robs them of the power of will, and hands them over the helpless victims of their own lusts and passions. Why, brethren, we could each of us find illustrations of this truth—men who have been enslaved by sin. The drunkard is an obvious illustration. Do you think the drunkard never repents? Do you think he is never ashamed of himself? Do you think he never makes his resolves to turn his back upon strong drink for ever? In the light of the morning, when Reason has regained her throne, he weeps over the debauch of the previous evening, and resolves never again to fall. But the evening comes, and he is back again at his cups. 'The habit has become too much for me,' was the only excuse one poor fellow



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could give. 'The habit has become too much for me.' He had allowed sin to come and dwell in his heart, and the guest had become a tyrant. 'Thou hast made us lords,' it said to him, 'and canst not put us down.' Sin had destroyed his freedom, paralyzed his will, and reduced him to the condition of a helpless slave.

And that is what sin does to all—as most of us know to our cost—it brings us into thralldom and abject slavery. Is that the last word I have got to say—that sin, this abounding sin, enslaves men? No, brethren, that is not the last word. 'Where sin abounds, grace abounds more exceedingly.' Grace counteracts, overcomes, overpowers sin. Sin enslaves, but *grace emancipates*. Paul speaks of being 'made free' from sin—free from the law of sin and death. John speaks of being 'loosed' from sin. Grace is the great liberator. Sin binds, but grace is stronger than sin, and breaks and shatters every chain in which the sinner lies bound. Sin fettered Zacchæus, but grace emancipated him. Sin fettered Onesimus, but grace emancipated him. Sin fettered Augustine, but grace emancipated him. Sin fettered John Newton, but grace emancipated him. Sin fetters the drunkard and the profligate and the thief to-day; but every brand snatched from the burning, every trophy of the redeeming work of the Salvation Army proclaims that *grace emancipates*. It was in Christ God's grace was made known, and

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that was the object of Christ's coming, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and the opening of prisons to them that are bound. Yes, sin may be strong, but grace is stronger. There is not one so helplessly bound that grace cannot make him walk at liberty. Do you cry like Paul out of your bitter bondage, 'Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?' Listen. Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. 'Where sin abounds, grace abounds more exceedingly.'

III. I have only a word to add about the final *result of sin*. The result of sin, according to these chapters, is *death*. I need not enter into a discussion of the precise meaning to be attached to the word. I believe Paul held that physical death was the result and consequence of sin; but whether under this one word 'death' he embraces the idea of moral as well as physical death, I cannot now stay to discuss. Let the word just stand in its bare and awful simplicity. That is where sin ends—death. 'Sin reigned in death.' 'The wages of sin is death.' 'We have all sinned.'

Is 'death,' then, the last word? No, 'death' is not the last word. Against sin I have to set grace. Where sin abounded there grace did abound more exceedingly, that as sin reigned in death even so might grace reign through righteousness unto *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you remember how John Bunyan describes the passing of old Honest? Let me quote it to you.

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'When the day that he was to be gone was come, he addressed himself to go over the river. Now, the river at that time overflowed the banks in some places, but Mr. Honest in his lifetime had spoken to one Good Conscience to meet him there, the which he also did, and lent him his hand and so helped him over. The last words of Mr. Honest were, "Grace reigns." So he left the world.'

And so, when we go down to the gates of death and find those gloomy portals transform themselves into the pearly gates of the Golden City, and when we find that we have come, not to the pit and eternal silence, but to the general assembly and church of the first-born written in heaven, we too shall say, 'Grace reigns,' and shall leave the world with joy. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life. 'Where sin abounds, grace doth abound more exceedingly.'

And how shall we receive this mighty energy of grace? This liberating, redeeming, cleansing grace, how shall we get it? Through Jesus Christ. When we touch Him, all the redeeming and healing powers that dwell in Him will flow into us. Of His fulness we can all partake, grace instead of grace. Yea, if we but touch the hem of His garment we shall all be made whole. And Christ is here to be touched. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.

## VI

### Temptation

*'There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear ; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation make also a way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.'*—I COR. x. 13.

NO one can read this verse and compare it with what St. James has said, without seeing that Paul and James approach the subject of temptation from rather different standpoints. James, in that profound passage in his first chapter, makes temptation originate *within*, in the lust, the irregular and sinful desires of the heart. 'Each man is tempted when he is drawn aside by his own lust and enticed.' It is equally clear that in this passage St. Paul regards temptation as taking men from *without* ; and an examination of the context shows that he is thinking chiefly of the difficulties that confront his Corinthian converts from intercourse with pagan friends and attendance at pagan feasts.

At first sight we might be tempted to think that here was a clear case of antagonism between

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Paul, the prince of evangelical preachers, and James, the prince of moralists ; as indeed many have thought they discovered an irreconcilable antagonism between Paul's doctrine of salvation by faith and James's emphatic declaration that faith without works is sterile and dead. But just as further and more thoughtful consideration shows that Paul's doctrine of faith and James's doctrine of works are not antagonistic, but complementary, so on second thoughts we shall find James's teaching about temptation originating in the sinful heart and Paul's teaching about temptation coming upon a man from the sinful world, far from being contradictory and mutually exclusive, really supplement and complete each other.

There are, then, two factors in every temptation, the sinful heart within, the evil world without, and they stand to one another much in the relation of the powder-magazine and the lighted match. Temptation originates in the heart, says James, and that is absolutely true. The heart is the powder-magazine. But for the lusts raging there, the allurements of the world would be absolutely powerless for harm. Temptation comes from the sinful world, says Paul ; that is also true. The world is the lighted match ; but for the allurements and incitements of the world, the sinful desires of the heart would never be called into play. It is when the match is applied to the powder-magazine that danger arises. It is when deep calls to deep,

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it is when the sinful world without makes its appeal to the sinful heart within, that temptation is born.

Now, the possibility, nay, the likelihood, of temptation is involved in the fact that we are what we are, and the world we live in is such as it is. For we carry about with us corrupt and depraved hearts. We are born into a fatal heritage of evil desire. 'There is none that doeth good, no, not one.' And, on the other hand, the world, according to the consistent testimony of Scripture, is itself conceived as at enmity with God, and along with 'the flesh' and 'the devil,' 'the world' is regarded as the most potent incitement to sin. If we had pure and stainless hearts, or if the world was a world in harmony with God, temptation would not arise; but being what we are, and the world being such as it is, temptation is likely, nay, certain, to meet us.

I. *Occasion to be avoided.*—In face of the danger arising from temptation, what are we to do? First of all, and for this we have our Lord's authority and warrant, *we must avoid all possible occasion of temptation.* I have said just now that being what we are, and the world being such as it is, temptation is likely, nay, certain to meet us. I am not going to modify that statement in any way. 'Take what way we can to heaven,' said an old Scotch saint, 'the way is hedged with crosses.' But while I say temptation is likely, nay, certain, to meet us, we can by our conduct either multiply

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or diminish the occasions of temptation. And the first thing we have to do is to see to it that we incur no risk of temptation that we can possibly avoid.

‘Lead us not into temptation,’ our Lord taught us to pray. That petition in the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples to pray is prompted by a recognition of human frailty and weakness. Our Lord knew how easy it was for the strongest to fall; how a rock man like Peter may become a blaspheming craven; how an enthusiast like John Mark may turn coward; how a zealous and hearty worker like Demas may succumb to the world’s seduction. And realizing the terrible power of temptation and the weakness of the human heart, He taught His disciples of every age to pray, and to pray it every day of their lives, this prayer—‘Lead us not into temptation.’

What attitude are we to take up towards temptation? We are by all possible means to avoid it and escape it. Yes, I will go so far as to say, we are to run away from it. The truly brave man is not the man who laughs at temptation, but the man who is brave enough to recognize his own weakness and be afraid of it. Yes, I say, he is the truly wise and brave man! The truly wise man is not the man who is always trying to see how near he can come to the edge of a precipice without falling over. The truly wise man is the man who keeps as far away from the edge as he

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can. And in exactly the same way the truly brave man is the man who fears temptation and gives it a wide berth.

Is it paradoxical to say that 'fear is an element in Christian courage'? At any rate, 'fear' has its part to play in the Christian life. 'Work out your own salvation,' says the Apostle, 'with *fear* and trembling'—yes, with fear and trembling, knowing how many and how terrible are the foes that will face us in our journey to the Celestial City. 'Let us, therefore, *fear*,' says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'lest haply, a promise having been left of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to have come short of it.' 'Let us *fear*.' Are you ever afraid, brethren? Do you ever tremble for your own safety? Are you ever filled with terror lest you should come short of the promised rest? Are you ever like Paul, apprehensive that, after all, you yourself should be a castaway? The tragic histories of Samson, and Saul, and David, and Solomon, and Peter, and Judas have been wasted and thrown away upon us unless we have learned to 'fear,' and consequently to put our whole souls into that petition—'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'

These tragic histories have been wasted and thrown away upon thousands. That petition, 'Lead us not into temptation,' might just as well never have been in the Lord's Prayer at all. For do we not see men and women praying, 'Lead us



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not into temptation,' and then turning their prayer into a mockery by seeking the very temptations from which they prayed to be delivered? Oh, the foolhardiness and presumption of men! We talk about the foolish moth that flutters round the flame and at last flutters into it, but what are you to say of the folly of men who deliberately expose themselves to the onset of temptation and court their own destruction? What are you to say of the man who, knowing the fatal fascination of strong drink, deliberately dabbles with wine? What are you to say of the man who, knowing what a passion gambling becomes, deliberately ventures on to the racecourse? What are you to say of the man who, knowing how lust may become a raging and devouring flame, delights in unclean talk, feeds his mind with unclean literature, and feasts his eyes with unclean pictures? What are you to say of him? And that is what thousands and tens of thousands are doing.

We want above everything else a baptism of 'godly fear.' We want courage enough to be able to say, when invited to do this or that, 'I cannot—I am afraid.' Mr. Fearing, in John Bunyan's allegory, reached the Celestial City in safety; but the last view we have of Presumption is in that valley but a little beyond Interpreter's House, where he lies fast asleep and with fetters on his heels. Wherefore 'fear' lest we too, like that foolish Presumption, for the very same reason, fail of the

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promised rest. Remember your own weakness, I say, and *fear*. There are some things you had better never touch ; there are some books you had better never read ; there are some pictures you had better never see ; there are some places you had better never visit ; there are some people you had better never know. Your wisdom is to be afraid of them ; to shun them ; never to come near them. Listen to this sentence : ‘ The *fear of God* is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil ’—to give it a wide berth—‘ is understanding.’

II. *Temptation common to man*.—But supposing, as will of necessity happen, in spite of all our efforts, we find ourselves face to face with temptation ; what then ?

First of all remember this, and say it to your soul again and again, that no temptation has met you but such as is *common to men*. There is a difference in the meanings various commentators attach to the Greek word ἀνθρώπινος in the text. Literally, it means ‘ of or belonging to man.’ Our Revisers have translated it, ‘ such as man can bear.’ But that seems to me to be reading into the word more than it really contains. I follow Dr. Charles Edwards, who has written, perhaps, the finest English commentary on this Epistle, and translate it ‘ *common to men*.’ ‘ There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man.’

That is the first thing to remember. For this is one of the pleas behind which men shelter

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themselves when asked to account for their failure. 'There never was such a temptation as mine,' they say. Men have a trick of salving their consciences and excusing their miserable collapses, on the ground that the temptations to which they were exposed were of quite unique and extraordinary force. That is the plea Robert Burns advances in his address to the 'Over-good,' as he termed them—

'What's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted.'

I will say that to myself, in order to soften and modify my judgment upon another. But I will never say it for myself. The Bible does not allow me to say it to palliate my own sin and excuse my own fall. It is soothing to one's pride to believe that no one ever had such temptations as we ; but the Bible does not leave us that rag of comfort. Listen ! 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such *as is common to man.*' All talk about extraordinary temptation is the veriest cant and the most pitiable of pretence. People made the excuse long ago, and the Apostle retorted upon them : 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin.' People make it still ; and still it is legitimate to retort that they have not resisted unto blood ! None of us has ever come to that point yet ! Do not lay the flattering unction to your souls that no one in the wide world has ever

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been tempted like you. The Bible says, and all history confirms the statement, that no temptation has ever taken us but such as is common to man.

III. *Temptation to be conquered.*—There is no positive comfort in the assertion that our temptations are common to men. When some one tried to comfort Tennyson in his grief for Hallam by reminding him that ‘loss was common to the race,’ the poet’s retort, you remember, was this: ‘That loss is common would not make my own less bitter, rather more.’ And the knowledge that others are tempted in much the same way as we are, in itself does not bring much comfort and encouragement to our souls. But there is a truth which is of unspeakable comfort to those who are in the midst of manifold temptations, viz. *every temptation is to be overcome*. Let me repeat it. *Every temptation is to be overcome*. You must make that belief your very own, if you are to emerge victorious out of your conflicts with temptation. To those who are down, who are dead beat, who are almost tempted to give up, we must say again and again, every temptation—without any exception—every temptation is to be overcome.

Henry Drummond tells, in one of his books, a story about the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsular campaign. He was trying to get his troops into a place of safety, and between him and their safety ran a deep and rapid river. Neither bridge nor ford could be seen, and it was a hostile

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country ; he sent his men up and down the side of the river to hunt for a bridge or a ford, and they found none. So the Duke himself went to the top of a hill near by, and looked through his telescope, and far away down the riverside he saw a town, and on the other side of the river he saw a straggling village, and he said, 'Now, between that town and that village there must be a bridge or a ford.' So when night came, he sent his soldiers in the silence and darkness to see, and they brought back the report : 'Yes, there is a ford.' He passed his army over that ford that night, and next morning they were all in the land of safety. The danger besetting us may be manifold and formidable, but remember this—*there is always a ford!* There is no occasion for despondency or despair. *Every temptation is to be conquered.*

I want you to believe this, joyfully and gladly to believe it. It is the condition of victory. You can do nothing while you despair. Before any man can achieve a triumph, he must believe in its possibility. But all things are possible *to him that believeth*. And surely we have warrant enough for this belief ; for it is based not simply upon the explicit statement of Scripture, but it is confirmed and verified by history and experience. Cast your eye back over the centuries, and have you not ample evidence that every temptation can be overcome ?

Is it possible to live a holy life amid unclean

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surroundings? Yes, it is. For I read of some even in wicked Sardis who did not defile their garments; and I read of saints even in Cæsar's vile and unspeakable household. Even amid the rank corruption and unbridled profligacy of Charles II.'s court, Mary Godolphin grew up like a pure white flower.

Is it possible to stand one's ground as a Christian in face of adverse circumstances? Yes, it is. For I read of one Antipas, who was Christ's faithful witness even in Pergamum where Satan's seat was, and I read of the noble army of martyrs—Polycarp, Ignatius, Blandina, Felicitas, Ponticus, and others who 'braved the tyrant's brandished steel, the lion's gory mane,' but who held fast their confession; and of others who had trials of mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment (of whom the world was not worthy), but who never denied the Name.

Is it possible for a man to overcome a sin that he himself has cherished and fostered until it has become a tyrant, a despot? Yes, it is possible. For I read of an Augustine conquering his lust, and a Francis overcoming his profligacy, and a Bunyan overcoming his profanity, and a Gough overcoming his fatal craving for drink.

All things are possible. Every temptation is to be overcome. I look back over the centuries, and when I see the triumphs weak men have won, I feel constrained to break out into Paul's pæan,

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‘Who shall separate us?’ ‘Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or famine, or peril, or sword?’ Conjure up the most terrible temptation you can conceive! Can they overwhelm the soul and separate him from God? No! no! no! ‘In all these things we are more than conquerors’—we *over-overcome*—‘through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life’—listen to the list, brethren—neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

IV. *The faithfulness of God.*—And the ground and reason for our confidence that every temptation can be overcome is that *God is faithful*. ‘God is faithful,’ says the Apostle, ‘who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make also the way of escape that ye may be able to endure it.’ Notice, the Apostle does not give as his reason for confidence that *man is strong*, but that *God is faithful*. Men who have faced temptation confiding only in their own strength have come to hideous ruin. It is the men who, distrustful of self, have leaned upon God who have come off more than conquerors. And that is what we want to remember in face of the fierce trials and temptations of life, that God is on our side.

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We are apt in estimating the forces on either side to leave God out of account. This is how many state the case—on the one side principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places; and on the other side, poor weak, frail man. If that were how the case really stood, there would be nothing for us but hopeless and disastrous defeat. But that is not how the case stands at all. This is the true statement—on the one side principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places; and on the other, man *and God*. What does that mean? That means conquest, victory, triumph. ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’ ‘The Lord is on my side, I will not fear; what can man do unto me? The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be moved in the heart of the seas. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.’

That is the Apostle’s confidence. ‘God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear.’ He will always provide a way of escape, either by removing the temptation or by reinforcing us. ‘The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation,’ says the



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Apostle. Yes, the Lord knoweth how to deliver, though perhaps He may choose to deliver not by removing the temptation, but by redoubling our strength, so that we may be able to endure it. That was the method he took with Paul and his thorn in the flesh, that messenger of Satan sent to buffet him. Concerning this thing, he besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him. But instead of taking the thorn away, God gave Paul strength to endure it. 'My grace,' He said, 'is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' But in one way or other the Lord will be faithful and will deliver! He has been faithful to multitudes; He will be faithful also to you. God will not suffer thy foot to be moved. Yea, thou shalt be holden up, for God is able to make thee stand!

What attitude, then, shall we take up towards temptation? Conscious of our own weakness, we will seek whenever possible to escape it. But if escape it we cannot (and escape it completely no man possibly can), we will face it with courage and high hope, leaning upon God, and looking to Him for power. I have seen a picture by one of our great artists of a young knight on the verge of a dark wood through which he has to pass. That wood contains all manner of lurking perils and stealthy enemies, and before entering it the young knight has taken off his helmet, and is pouring out his soul in prayer. And the legend

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at the foot of the picture is this : 'Into Thy hands, O Lord.' We too stand like that young knight, face to face with all manner of dangers and perils ; fierce and deadly temptations of many a kind will assail us as we make our way through the mystic wood. What better can we do than commit ourselves into the keeping of the same gracious and mighty God ? 'Into Thy hands we commit ourselves.' If we do that, we shall never perish, for none can pluck us out of His hands. Have you done it ? Exposed to life's deadly temptations, have you done it ? Have you committed your way unto the Lord ? Do that, and you can face every temptation without doubt or fear. 'Only be strong and of a good courage, for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest.'

## VII

### Hindrances

*'Who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?'—*  
GAL. v. 7.

THIS text is a convenient motto for a sermon devoted to a discussion of some of the things that prevent and hinder men from embracing the Christian life to-day. Right at the beginning let us draw a distinction between an *excuse* and a *hindrance*. There is a touch of pretence about the one; there is equally a suggestion of reality and genuineness about the other. Men *make* excuses; they do not make hindrances—they find them. When a man does not want to do a thing he ought to do, he *excuses* himself. When a man wants to do a thing and feels he cannot, he is *hindered*. The difference between an *excuse* and a *hindrance* is the difference between a *feigned* and a *real* obstacle. The reasons, for instance, that the invited guests advanced for non-attendance at the marriage feast in the Gospel parable, viz. that one had bought a field, and another had purchased five yoke of oxen, and another had married a wife,

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were not reasons at all ; they were poor, lame, paltry excuses. Not one had any real difficulty in the way of attendance. The simple truth was, that they did not want to go. And in exactly the same way, there are many to-day who make 'excuses' for not embracing the Christian life. The difficulties are all trumped up, imaginary, and pretended. The fact is, they do not want to live the Christian life ; they love their money, their pleasure, their sin, better than they love Christ.

But while a great many, I am inclined to think the majority, of those who have not obeyed the truth have only poor and lame and wholly inadequate *excuses* to give for their disobedience, I also believe—nay, I know from what comes under my notice well-nigh every week—that there are many who *want* to embrace the Christian life, but who cannot, because of what to them are *real* and *genuine difficulties*. You remember what Pascal says about these two classes of people in those deep *Thoughts* of his : 'I can have nothing but compassion for all who sincerely lament their doubt ; who look upon it as the worst of evils, and who spare no pains to escape it ; but if this very condition of doubt be the subject of his joy and boasting, I have no words in which to describe a creature so extravagant.' For the man who conjures up difficulties, and manufactures doubts, and who declines Christ's call with a light heart and a smiling face, I have neither pity nor

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sympathy ; but for the man who *wants* to follow Christ, and who is in an agony because he cannot, I have the profoundest compassion. Now, there *are* such people in the world ; men who *want* to be Christians, but who find hindrances, real difficulties, in the way. My object is to do what I can with God's help to remove such hindrances : to make straight paths for your feet, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed.

Now, what are the hindrances men find in the way of their acceptance of Christ and the Christian life ? When I urge people to make Christ their King, and embrace the Christian life, what are the objections I am most often faced with ? The objections are of two broad kinds. There are, first of all, objections raised on the score of other people ; and, secondly, there are objections personal to the objectors themselves.

I. *The inconsistency of Christians.*—There are objections raised on the score of other people ; or, to put the matter quite bluntly, men find a genuine hindrance in the way of their acceptance of Christ and the Christian life in the inconsistent and unworthy lives that so many professing Christians live. I am constantly meeting with this objection. People say to me, 'What is the use of being a Christian ? What is the use of making a profession and joining the Church ? Christians are no better than other people.' Again and again I have had

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to listen to statements like these: 'I find more kindness and truth and honour among worldly people than I do among so-called Christians,' and people are repelled from the Church and the open confession of Christ because those who bear Christ's name have so little of Christ's spirit.

The lives of professing Christians have much to answer for. What is the reason for the indifference and utter irreligion of so many thousands in our land? Why is it that only one in six, or one in seven, of the people of the Metropolis pay any attention to religion at all? This is, at any rate, part of the reason. They see so little *in* religion. It makes so little difference. It leaves men as it found them—mean, petty, grasping, selfish. There is nothing in the lives of Christians to commend their faith. The fact about it is that we have not yet realized that Christianity has to do with our speech, our temper, our business, our every act. When a man is in Christ, he is 'a new creature.' He puts off the old man with his deeds, and puts on the new man, which is being renewed after the image of Him that created him. So says the Apostle.

But are we 'new men?' As compared with our next-door neighbour, who is not a Christian, have we been made anew? Can the most casual on-looker detect a difference—in tone and manner, and life and aim? 'The works of the flesh are these,' writes Paul, a little lower down in this

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chapter : 'fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factious divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revelling, and such like.' And concerning these 'works of the flesh,' he says distinctly that they which practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, *i.e.* they ought to have no place, no inch of foothold, in the heart and life of a Christian. Now, go through the list, and see how far you are free. Fornication? Yes. Uncleanness? Yes. Lasciviousness? Yes. Idolatry? Yes. With these grosser sins we have no difficulty. But read on. Enmities. Are you free from them? Have you no foes, no bitter feuds? Strife. Do you never quarrel? Jealousies. Have you no secret hates? Do you never utter poisoned words about a rival? Wraths. Do you never break out into angry and violent speech? It is in these things we stand condemned; and it is because men see us just as prone to quarrel, just as envious, just as full of backbiting and jealousy, just as wrathful and bitter, that they are repelled from the religion we profess.

And in the next verse Paul passes on to the positive marks of the true Christian. Not only ought he to be free from certain sins and vices, but he ought to be marked by certain positive virtues. Listen. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance.' Go through that

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list again, and interrogate your heart concerning each item in it. Love? Are you loving, affectionate, self-sacrificing? Joy? Are you bright and sunny and triumphant? Peace? Do you lead a quiet and peaceful life in all goodness and gravity? Long-suffering? Are you patient—in the shop, in the home; with those under your authority are you patient? Kindness? Are you kind? Goodness; faithfulness; meekness; temperance? Do you possess these qualities? Do they mark your life and conduct? 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance.' Would that stand for your picture?

If it did, do you not think men would be attracted to our Churches, to our Christ? Yes, they would—certainly and inevitably they would—if the fruits of the Spirit were only to be seen in us. Instead of remaining without, crying 'There is no God,' they would come crowding to the doors of our sanctuaries, saying, 'Surely God is among you, and there is none else.' They remain without, they remain callous and indifferent, because they see us just as selfish, hard, quarrelsome, bitter, grasping, and eager as the man who makes no profession at all. Brethren, there is one call that comes to you and me with a note of urgency and solemn warning in it. It is this: 'Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.' For there



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is a terrible verse in the Gospel which says, 'That it were better for a man that he should have a millstone hanged about his neck, and be drowned in the midst of the sea, than that he should put a stumbling-block in his brother's way.'

And now—to deal with the difficulty itself—the question to ask of any one who holds aloof from Christ because of the unworthy lives of Christians is, Have you a right to let this be a hindrance to you? It is to many. But has it any right to be a hindrance? Remember these two things—

(1) If you wish to deal quite honestly by the Christian faith, you have no right to judge it by the unworthy lives of some who profess it; you must judge it by the account it gives of itself in the New Testament—you must judge it by Christ Himself. The inconsistencies you see in so-called Christian people are there, not because they are Christians, but just because to that degree they are not Christians. I say you must judge of Christianity and its claims, not by this or that man, but by the presentation of it you find in the pages of the New Testament, and the life of Jesus Christ.

(2) Considerations about other people ought not in any way to affect your personal relations to Jesus Christ. The relation between Christ and you is a purely personal and individual one. No third person can intervene. Christ makes a certain claim upon *you*. He issues a certain call to *you*.

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The point is, What are you going to say to that claim and that call? That others disobey is quite beside the point. The question you have to settle is, what *you* will do. You remember when at the Sea of Tiberias our Lord spoke so solemnly about what the future was to bring to Peter, that impetuous and impulsive disciple caught sight of John standing by, and, perhaps not liking that he, and he alone, should be made the subject of so solemn a prophecy, he turned to Jesus and said, 'Lord, and what shall this man do?' And our Lord answered, almost sharply, 'What is that to thee?—follow Me.' Peter was not to shelter behind John. John's life was no concern of his. What he had to do, was himself to follow Christ.

And is it not so with us? Christ issues His call to us. In our hearts we acknowledge His right to obedience. But we make hindrances of the conduct of this and that man. We say, 'So-and-so is grasping; and so-and-so is selfish; and so-and-so is mean and base.' It may be all true; but what does our Lord say? 'What is that to thee?—follow *thou* Me.' The faults and sins of other people will never justify our disobedience. Two blacks, we say, do not make a white. What you have to settle is, your own *personal* relations. For religion, in the last resort, is strictly an individual matter; it is a matter between you and Christ. Yes; you may leave every one else in the

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wide world out of account, and regard it purely as a matter between *you* and *Christ*. What are you going to do with Christ? Are you going to do *your* duty? This man's sins and that man's failures are quite beside the point. Religion is a personal business. Every man shall bear his own burden, whatsoever it be.

But, in addition to these difficulties caused by others, a great many people find hindrances in things personal to themselves.

II. *Personal unworthiness*.—Many people find a terrible hindrance in *a vivid sense of personal unworthiness*. I am constantly meeting with people who, when urged to accept Christ and embrace the Christian life, object that '*they are not good enough*.' In other words, that very consciousness of sin which ought, one would have supposed, to have driven men to the Saviour, keeps them away from Him. It is very pitiful, but it makes the tragedy of many a life. I well remember an old gentleman I once knew who would have given all he possessed to feel he really belonged to Christ, but who, in answer to all my arguing and pleading, would say, 'Yes, Mr. Jones, that is all right for good people like yourself, but I'm not good enough.' Whether before the end of his life the good old soul found joy and peace in believing I cannot tell; but whether or not, this I know, Jesus would have mercy on this man, who so earnestly desired to come to Him.

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How can any one with the New Testament in his hands think he is not 'good enough' for Christ? Do you read of any in Palestine whom He rejected as not 'good enough'? As a matter of fact, did He not welcome those whom everybody else despised? Did they not say of Him, 'This Man receiveth sinners'? And what sinners they were—open, notorious, vile, disgraceful sinners! Go through the list—Matthew the publican, Zaccheus the chief publican, the woman who was a sinner, the dying thief. Think of it—the swindler, the harlot, the dying robber. Christ received them with open arms. And these stories are in the New Testament to emphasize and enforce and underline that great Gospel sentence, 'Whosoever will may come.' That was, shall I say, the peculiarity, the unique characteristic, of Jesus as a religious Teacher. He took anybody and everybody, even the vilest of the vile. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Do you suppose that after receiving sinners through the centuries, Christ is going to begin casting out now by casting out *you*? Not good enough, indeed! We come to Christ, not because we are good, but just because we are not good enough. If we were good enough, we should not need Christ. We seek Him and need Him just because we are forced to confess that 'Vile and full of sin we are.'

'Not good enough'? Why, there is just one place in the wide world for people who are not

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good enough, and that is the Cross of Jesus Christ. If you feel, like John Bunyan, that your heart is just a sink of iniquity, if the sense of your own guilt pinches you sore, then resolve to do what he did. 'My case being desperate,' he writes, 'I thought with myself, I can but die ; and if it must be so, it shall once be said that such a one died at the foot of Christ in prayer.' Yes ; if your case is so desperate, then make up your mind that if die you must, you will die at the foot of Christ's cross. But no sinner has yet died there. The cross offers a world-wide welcome. It issues a universal invitation.

'Thy promise is my only plea,  
With that I venture nigh ;  
Thou callest burdened souls to Thee,  
And such, O Lord, am I.'

And if you come, you shall, to the joy of your soul, find the truth of the promise, 'Whosoever cometh I will in no wise cast out.'

III. *Intellectual difficulties*.—Many find *intellectual difficulties* about points of Christian faith an almost *insuperable barrier*. I meet in the course of my ministry with many such. In olden days Churches laid considerable stress upon dogma and doctrine, and many found in these things a genuine hindrance to faith. But theological difficulties need no longer be a hindrance. For the most noteworthy difference between the Christianity of to-day and the Christianity of fifty years ago is

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the *change of emphasis*. Fifty years ago men felt that religion was bound up with belief in certain theological doctrines ; since then there has been a movement back to Christ, and men to-day recognize that religion consists in the personal adhesion of the sinner to the Saviour.

This does not minimize the importance of Christian doctrine. What our Churches are suffering from just now is not too much doctrine, but too little. We must serve God 'with the mind.' And wherever there is anything like robust intellectual life, there must inevitably be some attempt to give reasonable and logical expression to the great articles of the Christian faith. At the same time, a man is not saved by clear intellectual conceptions, but by *faith*, and faith is just the adhesion of the soul to Christ, the living trust of a sinner in a Saviour. Yes, religion centres in this, it finds its beating heart in this, it sums itself up in this—I give myself to Christ, to serve and obey and love Him, and to be kept and saved by Him.

You may say that is making religion a very simple thing. I know it is ; but in its essence religion is simple. Wayfaring men, though fools, need not err therein. Turn to your New Testament, and see what you find there. They were not learned people who flocked to Christ. 'The common people heard Him gladly.' Little children, humble women, provincial peasants, all flocked to Him. Plato made great requirements of those

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who wished to be his pupils. He wrote over the doors of his academy, 'Only those skilled in geometry can enter here.' But Jesus made no great intellectual requirements. Had He done so, Zaccheus, and the woman who was a sinner, and the dying thief, would never have found a place among His followers; and Galilean fishermen would never have been chosen for His first apostles. When I look at the requirements Jesus made, I find them absolutely simple. He said to Matthew, and to Paul and the rest, 'Follow Me.' He asked of His penitent disciple one question, 'Lovest thou Me?' As far as I can make out from the Gospels, all Jesus required was, that men should love Him well enough to follow Him.

I turn to the apostolic preaching, and I find the very same simplicity. Take the Philippian jailer as a crucial case. 'What must I do to be saved?' cried that troubled man. And Paul answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' Notice, Paul does not submit a list of doctrines; he does not ask assent to a number of dogmas—he asks simply for trust in Jesus Christ. 'Venture yourself on Jesus Christ,' he says; 'believe in Him to the extent of making Him your Master and Lord, and you shall be saved.' Religion, as far as I can make out, centred itself in the adhesion of the soul to Christ! It centres in exactly the same place to-day.

It is a great thing to be a master theologian!

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It is a great thing to have mastered all mysteries and all knowledge ! It is a great thing to be able to give satisfactory theories of inspiration and revelation, of the Incarnation and the Atonement ! But we need not be able to do it in order to be Christians. Is it necessary to be able to give an account of the inspiration of this old book in order to be a Christian ? Is it necessary to understand all about the person of Christ in order to be a Christian ? Is it necessary to be able to explain the Atonement in order to be a Christian ? No ; I will venture to affirm it is not necessary. You may have no 'views' about the Bible, you may be in the dark as to the person of Christ, you may have no theory of the Atonement, and yet if you love Christ enough to follow Him, to obey Him, to risk your eternity upon Him, you are a Christian. I repeat, you are a Christian ; for that is Christianity, the adhesion of the soul to Christ. And so I say to those troubled by intellectual difficulties—hindered from accepting Christ by this mystery and that—leave those things for a time. They are not essential to the Christian faith. The essential thing is quite simple. Do you love Christ ? Are you willing to follow Him ? To obey Him ? To do His will ? If you are, you are a Christian. Listen : 'Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' Do not wait for every rough place to be made plain. Begin with the simple thing you understand. Follow Christ. Obedience will



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in due time lead to larger knowledge. He that doeth the will shall know of the doctrine.

IV. *The responsibility of confession.*—Others make a hindrance, or rather find a hindrance, in the sense of the *tremendous responsibility attaching to an open confession of Christ*. People say, 'I am afraid of undertaking the Christian life. My life will be scrutinized so closely, and I shrink from the possibility of bringing discredit upon the name of Christ.' Now, up to a point, that is a legitimate and healthy feeling. We do take upon ourselves a great responsibility when we confess the name of Christ. Men watch us and mark us, and form their notions of the Christian religion from our conduct. When a soldier enters a regiment he becomes responsible for the honour of the regiment, and when a man confesses Christ he becomes responsible for the honour of Christ. 'Either with your shield or upon it,' said the Lacedemonian women to their men when they went forth to battle. And in much the same way we are charged to keep the commandment without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But have you ever thought of this? If you have heard Christ call, and if in your hearts you acknowledge His right to rule, then, however great be the responsibility we undertake in confessing Christ, we undertake a still heavier responsibility if we refuse to confess Him. Shall I illustrate what I

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mean by a personal reference? I shrank from becoming a preacher. I felt it was a terrible responsibility to stand up before men as an ambassador of Christ. For two whole years I tried to persuade myself I had no call to the ministry. But at last, after a long struggle, I *did* enter a pulpit, and took up the solemn charge of preaching the gospel, because I saw I should be incurring a still more awful responsibility if I ignored a clear call of God and kept out. And is it not so with you? You say it is a serious thing confessing Christ. Yes, it is; but is it not a more serious thing *not* to confess Him?

And remember this—Christ never calls us to a duty without giving us the needed strength. ‘My grace,’ He says to every one who shrinks from the responsibility, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’ Do not therefore let the thought of the solemn responsibility that will rest upon you hinder you from accepting the Christian life. Do what you see to be right, and trust Christ for the needed strength. The one intolerable load of responsibility is to recognize Christ’s right to rule, and yet to refuse Him obedience.

What doth hinder you? The hindrances that frighten you are really imaginary. When you face them they disappear. No one need hesitate on the ground of personal unworthiness. Jesus came to call sinners. No one need hesitate on the score of intellectual difficulty. The central demand of

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Christianity is plain and simple enough—Follow Me ; Love Me. No one need shrink from the responsibility. ‘We shall come off more than conquerors through Him that loved us.’ Then do not hang back any more. Do not delay a day. Give yourself to Christ and the Christian life this very night. He is passing through this church to-night, and to you and me He issues His call, ‘Follow Me.’ God give us grace to do what Peter did, what Matthew did, what John did, what Paul did, what the saints of every age have done. God give us grace to rise up, leave all, and follow Him.

## VIII

### Spiritual Shortsightedness

*'Seeing only what is near.'*—2 PETER i. 9.

THESE people of whom the Apostle speaks were in a word, *shortsighted* people. They had accepted the Gospel when it was first preached, but they had never taken religion seriously. They had not given diligence to add virtue to faith, knowledge to virtue, and temperance to knowledge, and patience to temperance, and godliness to patience, and love to godliness. There had been no serious striving after sanctification. They had made no attempt to pluck up and root out and cast forth the pleasant vices of the flesh to which they had once been addicted. They had never made an effort at the daily self-denial, and the daily bearing of the cross, and the daily purification.

They were no better men than when they first believed. Indeed, if anything, they were worse than in the days of their early faith. For the Apostle speaks of them as having forgotten the cleansing from their old sins, implying thereby

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that they had fallen back again into the lusts and abominations of paganism. The world had reasserted its power over these people ; its gross and palpable delights counted for more with them, and seemed infinitely more real to them, than the spiritual joys which religion promised. They saw only 'what was near.' They were the victims of moral and spiritual shortsightedness.

In an occasional magazine I read the other day the following sentence : 'One of the penalties of our high civilization, and the disappearance of any need for very keen physical sight, is the great increase of shortsightedness amongst English people.' It seems reasonable enough to believe that just as the invention of printing and the era of cheap books have weakened memory, so the many appliances of modern science for assisting vision by doing away with the need of keen sight may have done something to weaken and impair the sight faculty. But whether that be so or not, the fact of the prevalence of *shortsightedness* is certain enough. This shortsightedness brings deprivation and penalties along with it.

It brings its *deprivations*. Half the beauty of a glorious view often consists in the vision of the distant and far-off background. There is a world-famous view to be had from the terrace at Berne in Switzerland. But the beauty of that view is practically lost upon the man who can only see 'what is near.' For what makes that view a dream

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of delight is the vision in the distance of the peaks of the mighty Alps flashing and gleaming in their robes of spotless white, like the angel hosts of God.

And shortsightedness brings *its penalties* also. I remember very well when Sir Redvers Buller came home from South Africa, in almost the first speech he made after landing at Southampton, he drew attention to the immense superiority of the Boer over the Briton in the matter of vision. Accustomed to the clear atmosphere and vast distances of South Africa, the Boer had brought his sight faculty to such a pitch of perfection that he could see a moving object a mile or two farther off than the average Englishman could, with the result that he was aware of the approach of the English soldier long before the Englishman became aware of his nearness. And Sir Redvers did not hesitate to set down some of our calamities and disasters and defeats to this cause. He put the blame upon the shortsightedness of Englishmen. Some of us may think that part of the blame ought to be put down to shortsightedness of another kind, but Sir Redvers' remarks serve to illustrate my point, that physical shortsightedness carries with it its deprivations and its penalties.

Now, the *shortsightedness* of which the Apostle speaks was not physical, but *moral and spiritual*. And this spiritual shortsightedness is at once more prevalent and more perilous than the

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physical. It is more *prevalent*. After all, even though in recent years there may have been some increase, those who suffer from defective physical vision are in a minority amongst us. But the *spiritually shortsighted* embrace the vast majority of our race. Indeed, this is a defect which is common to us all more or less. We lack vision and outlook. Our horizons are contracted and narrow. What lies nearest looms largest. We have no eyes for the distant and the future and the far off. We are all of us like the man with the muck-rake; we are all eyes for the straw and sticks and dust that lie at our feet, and never give a look at the Celestial Crown which is held above our head. We see only that 'which is near.'

And this spiritual shortsightedness which is so much more prevalent is also infinitely more *perilous*. We have read and heard of people who have come by physical injury because of defective sight. According to Sir Redvers Buller, there are many English soldiers lying in their graves on the South African veldt all because they could not see as well as their antagonists. But at the worst, physical shortsightedness can only injure and maim and cripple and kill the body. But *spiritual shortsightedness* can, and *does*, injure and maim and cripple and kill the soul. Shortsightedness is doing that very thing in our midst to-day. I can see men with starved, shrivelled, and stunted souls, all because they only see 'that which is near.'

## Spiritual Shortsightedness

Some of the most terrible evils that afflict our race—which blight and ruin and curse humanity—spring from shortsightedness. Trace sin—hydra-headed, multiform sin—back to its birthplace, and whence does it spring? From spiritual shortsightedness. Trace worldliness—the absorption of men in the business and pleasure of this life—back to its birthplace, and whence does it spring? From spiritual shortsightedness. Trace despair—despair about men and the world's future—back to its birthplace, and whence does it spring? From spiritual shortsightedness. This is why men run into sin ; this is why they love this present world ; this is why they fall into despair ; they see only that which is near. Sin, worldliness, and despair are among the penalties and consequences of spiritual shortsightedness.

I. First, let me speak of SHORTSIGHTEDNESS AND SIN. Why do men sin? I do not mean to raise the question of the ultimate origin of evil. That would land us in interminable philosophical discussions, and take us clean away from the point at issue. It is not of man in general, but of man in particular, that I am speaking now. Why does the particular man sin? What induces him to do it? We hear in these days much about 'inherited tendency,' which is only another term for the old theological expression, 'original sin,' and that 'inherited tendency' is a tremendous and terrible factor in the question of sin admits of no doubt or



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dispute. Still, to say that a man sins because of 'inherited tendencies,' is a libel upon human nature, and reduces every man to the level of the slave. Not one of us would dare plead 'inherited tendencies' as an excuse for our wrong doing at the bar of God, and yet *we* have all sinned—yes, **WE** have all sinned. Why did **WE** sin? It was not because we loved sin for its own sake. It was not because we deliberately and wilfully chose to become rebels against the eternal Law of Righteousness. Why, then? Why did **WE** sin?

I can tell you. We were tempted by the bait sin held out to us. We saw the immediate advantage, the present gratification, the momentary pleasure; we saw that which was near; we had no eyes for the pain, and the punishment, and the remorse, and the regret that lay further back, but were bound to follow; we saw only that which was nearest—the immediate gratification—and we sinned for *that*.

That is indeed the history of every sin since the world began. 'In the day that ye eat thereof,' said the tempter to Eve in the garden, 'then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.' The devil said nothing about exile and homelessness and death; he emphasized the present and immediate advantage, and Eve, seeing only what was near, plucked and ate and fell. 'Feed me, I pray thee,' said Esau to his brother Jacob, 'with that same red pottage

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for I am faint.' And Jacob said, 'Sell me this day thy birthright.' And Esau, like a fool, said, 'Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall the birthright do to me?' The smell of the soup whetted the edge of his intolerable hunger, the birthright was a far-off, intangible sort of thing; but this mess of red pottage promised a present gratification; and because he saw only that which was near, Esau despised his birthright. 'All these things shall be Thine,' said the devil to Christ, as he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. 'All these things shall be thine,' he says to every man when he tempts him to sin; he promises him his fill of worldly pleasure and sensual delight. 'All these things shall be thine,' he said to the younger son in the parable. He made no mention of the hunger, and poverty, and rags, and wretchedness that were bound to come afterwards. He emphasized the immediate pleasure. And fastening his eyes upon that, seeing only that which is near, the young man gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.

And that essentially is the history of every sin. Sin brings with it an immediate gratification. The Bible recognizes this quite frankly. It speaks of the *pleasures* of sin. Sin at the moment means delight; ultimately it means death. At the moment it promises pleasure; in the long run it means the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not

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quenched. And men sin because they blind themselves to all that seems far off and remote, to the regret, and remorse, and shame, and hell that sin entails; and have eyes only for what is nearest—the immediate gratification. The covetous man sees his growing heap of gold, and not his lean and shrivelled soul. The drunkard sees satisfaction for his appetite, and not the drunkard's grave. The profligate sees gratification for his burning lust, and not the profligate's hell. Shortsightedness is the mother of sin. Men sin because they only see what is near.

And what we want to save us from sin is a clarified vision, a longer and more far-reaching sight, a wider outlook. And for that clarified vision let us pray; and especially let every young man standing on the threshold of life unceasingly pray for it. Here is a prayer for us all. 'Anoint our eyes, O Lord, with eye-salve, that we may see sin not simply in its immediate results, but in its ultimate consequences; clarify our vision, that we may see not simply the momentary pleasure of sin, but its final issue, and realize with the Apostle that the "wages of sin is death."'

II. Secondly, let me speak of *shortsightedness and worldliness*. Really *worldliness* is only one form of sin, and on the principle that the greater includes the less, all that I have said about *sin* applies also to worldliness. But because *worldliness* is so fearfully prevalent, and also because it is scarcely

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reckoned a sin at all, I have thought it worth while to deal with it separately.

If I had to describe this age in one word, I think I should use the word 'materialistic.' The various ages of the world's life have had varying characteristics. Society in Greece in the fourth and third centuries before Christ was eaten up with unnatural vices. Society in Rome in the first century of our era was lustful and luxurious. Society in Italy in the time of the Renaissance showed a combination of intellectual brilliance and the wildest moral license. Society in England in this twentieth century is marked by a dull and gross materialism. There is an utter absence of the idealistic and the spiritual.

'The world is too much with us ;  
Soon and late, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers,'  
sang Wordsworth, many years ago. He would have repeated those words only with tenfold greater emphasis if he had lived in this day. 'The world is too much with us.' There is nothing else present with some of us. We are absorbed by it, possessed by it, entirely taken up with it. We think of nothing else, we speak of nothing else, we concern ourselves with nothing else, save the world and its business, and its wealth, and its fame, and its pleasure. Of thousands and tens of thousands of men and women it is true they make their portion in this world, and they have no portion whatsoever outside of it.

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I have heard preachers wax eloquent in their denunciation of something they call 'other worldliness.' I will confess to you, when I hear preachers denouncing 'other worldliness,' I could laugh at the unconscious humour of the thing, were it not so pitiful and tragic that I feel constrained to weep instead. To charge this age with 'other worldliness' is the bitterest satire. Irony can no further go than that. 'Other worldliness' is not the besetting sin of this twentieth century—*worldliness* is. A sermon on 'other worldliness' might perhaps have been profitable for the monks of the Thebaid in the early centuries of the Christian era, but the text to preach from in England in these later days is this: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' A minister has something better to do with his time than denounce and belabour sins which do not exist; he has to deal plainly and faithfully with the sins that do verily beset and imperil the souls of his people. As far as modern English society is concerned, 'other worldliness' is a non-existent sin.

If I were preaching on 'other worldliness,' to how many in this congregation should I be preaching? How many of you are open to the charge—that you live and move and have your being far too much in the other world? Should I be preaching to ten, to five, to one? I have never met this 'other worldly' person; he exists

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only in the imagination of magazine writers and popular preachers. The man I am constantly meeting, the man I find in almost every person I come across, is the 'worldly' person—the man to whom this world is everything, whose whole interests are here, and who never thinks of the other world at all. The sin to denounce, the sin against which to warn people in season and out of season, is the sin of *worldliness*, for the world is far too much with us all; it casts its fatal spell upon us all, and the sore temptation of us all is to lay up our treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal.

The reason for this prevalent and well-nigh universal sin of *worldliness* is *spiritual shortsightedness*. The prizes that earth offers are palpable, tangible, immediate. They engross men's attention, they absorb their thought, they fill the horizon of their desire. Heaven and the smile of Christ, and the well-done of God, seem remote, far off, uncertain. Money, pleasure, fame, banish them from the mind, and to the acquisition of these things men devote themselves, seeing only 'what is near.'

Christian saw in Interpreter's House two boys, Passion and Patience. Passion had a bag of gold in his hand, but Patience was willing to take his Governor's advice and wait for his good things till the next year. And these two boys, says John Bunyan, are typical of the worldly man and the

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true Christian. The worldly man, with his favourite proverb of 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' wants his good things at once ; he wants his bag of gold in the hand, not seeming to realize that his money must perish with him ; but the Christian is willing to do without this world's wealth, because he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

And in all this John Bunyan has shown his usual unerring insight. Most men side with Passion. They want the bag of gold in the hand. They can understand the advantage of that. And fascinated by the prospect of that, they have no thought for heaven ; they see only that which is near. I have seen a notice in shops to this effect : 'Quick returns and small profits.' The world takes men captive by the promise of 'quick returns.' This man sees the solid advantages wealth brings, and he lives for it, never caring to think of the day when his money will slip from his nerveless fingers. This man sees the present and substantial advantages fame brings, and he lives for it, never caring to look forward to that time when the first will be last, and the last first. And so men become absorbed by the world, and live for its business, and its wealth, and its power, and then awake to find themselves wretched, and poor, and blind, and miserable, and naked, all because they have never given a thought to heaven, but have seen only that which is near.

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If we are ever to be delivered from this blight of worldliness, this soul-destroying absorption in what is seen and temporal, we need vision and outlook and extended horizons. We need to look up and above and beyond. 'Lift up your eyes' is the reiterated appeal of the old Book. We need to lift them up—beyond the fleeting transient things of earth—to the things unseen and eternal, to the everlasting hills, to the Jerusalem above, to that Blessed City where place is determined not by wealth, but by holiness ; and position not by worldly fame, but by love. Yes, I will be bold to say that to deliver us from the peculiar temptations of this materialistic age there is nothing we want more than more constant thought about heaven, a more abiding realization of eternity. We must give heaven a larger place in our speech and thought. It is only as the thought of heaven is ever with us that we shall be emancipated from the thralldom of the world.

There never was a more magnificent triumph over the spirit of worldliness than that which Moses achieved, for he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. How did he win that triumph? Listen, 'he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.' He looked away and beyond the glittering prize the world held out to him ; he looked away to heaven, and was strong to resist the world and deliver his soul. If we are to conquer the world, we too must have respect to



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the recompense of the reward. Our safety lies in the *long look*. Let no one persuade you that the thought of heaven is the mark of the dreamy and unpractical man. Charles Kingsley was one of the most strenuous and practical of men, but heaven was never absent from his thought. Dr. Dale was the last man in the world against whom a charge of sentimentality could be brought, but how large a place heaven occupied in his thinking may be gathered by the space allotted to hymns about the better country in the book which he compiled. The thought of heaven is no dreamy unpractical thing; it is the means by which we are to emancipate ourselves from slavery to the transient and the perishing.

Cultivate the *long look*. 'Looking at the things which are not seen,' says the old Book. 'Enduring as seeing Him that is invisible.' 'Looking away'—for so the Greek reads—'looking away to Jesus.' Cultivate, I say, the *long look*. Follow everything to its ultimate issue, and see how it will look in the light of eternity and heaven. Bring business, and wealth, and fame, and power, and high station, and measure them all by the standard of eternity, and labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.

III. Thirdly, let me say a word about *shortsightedness* and *despair*. We sometimes fall into despondency and something like despair in our Christian service. There come times to us all when we feel

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like Elijah when under the juniper tree, and we say like him, 'Lord, let me die, for I have laboured for nought, and in vain.' What is the cause and origin of our despondency? Shortsightedness. We have only looked at the things which are near. That was what Elijah did. He thought of Ahab and Jezebel and the priests of Baal and the apostate people—all the forces of evil that confronted him, until he despaired. He had not lifted up his thoughts to God, or he would have been hopeful and confident in spite of them all. And so we: we think of the powers of evil arrayed against us, we look at the vice and lust and drunkenness of our land, all the 'vested interests' of wickedness, and they are so terribly strong, and so terribly real, and so terribly near, that we are often tempted to abandon the struggle in despair.

And the remedy for that hopelessness and despair is the *long look*. 'Lift up your eyes on high,' says the old Book. We despair when we see only the things that are near—the sin, the vice, the indifference and callousness of men; but we gain courage and hope when we see God. And that is what we want more than anything else in our Christian work, the ability to look above our difficulties, real and near as they are, and realize our Unseen Helper. 'Open his eyes that he may see,' prayed Elisha for his despairing servant at Dothan. That servant could only see the things that were near—the encircling Syrian host intent

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upon the prophet's destruction. But when his eyes were opened, he saw the mountain was full of chariots and horses of fire round about Elisha. You have seen the opposing hosts ; have you seen the army of celestial helpers ? Take the *long look*, above the things that are near and which work against you, to the invisible but almighty and eternal forces which are working for you. If the Apostles had only seen the things that were near—their own poverty and ignorance, and over against them a hostile world—they would never have undertaken the hopeless task of trying to convert it ; but they took the long look, they saw Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, and then they went everywhere preaching the Word.

What is it I see when I look out upon the world ? The nearest and most obvious facts are the facts of sin and wrong, and vice and selfishness, and irreligiousness, terrible enough to make any one despair. But I look up and away, and I see in the place of supreme authority and dominion the Man of Calvary, with the nail-prints still in His hand, and the spear-gash still in His side, the Man who bought the world by dying for it, and when I see Him there I cannot despair—no, despite the sin and vice and apparently impregnable strongholds of Satan, I cannot despair, I am full of radiant and unquenchable hope, for I know He will not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth.

## IX

### Walking without Fainting

*'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.'*—ISA. xl. 31.

GOD as the Source and Giver of strength is the prophet's theme in the text. 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' Man by himself is weak and helpless and impotent, but succoured by God he is equal to any task. 'With five shillings,' said Teresa the mystic, when her friends laughed at her proposal to build an orphanage—'with five shillings Teresa can do nothing; but with five shillings and God there is nothing Teresa cannot do.' And in that bold and daring claim the saint had Scripture for her warrant. 'Ye shall remove mountains,' said our Lord, 'and nothing shall be impossible to you.' And the Apostle Paul, as if writing a confirmatory comment on that promise of the Master, says, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.'

The same blessed and glorious truth of the

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power that comes to men when they enter into partnership with God is emphasized by the prophet in the text. And to illustrate how invincible and irresistible that power is, he adds three clauses to set forth what men can do in the strength of it: 'They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.'

That is a most noticeable sequence. Look at it. 'They shall mount up with wings . . .; they shall run . . .; they shall walk.' Flying, running, walking. At first sight this looks like an anticlimax, and the promise reads like a descending promise. If we had wished to use these phrases to illustrate the effects of the strength which God supplies, and if we had wished to use them in an ascending scale, so that each should intensify and carry to a higher point the assertion made in the other, we should have inverted the order, and should have read the clauses thus: 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall walk, and not faint; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.' But the prophet begins with the *flying* and ends with the *walking*. It looks at first sight, I repeat, as if it were a descending and diminishing promise; as if the progress were from greater to less, and from less to least. As Dr. George Adam Smith puts it, 'Soaring, running, walking; and is not the next stage, a cynic might ask, standing still?'

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But on second thoughts you can see that here is no anticlimax, and that this is not descending promise. The promise rises from good to better and better to best. It is a finer proof of the power of the grace of God that it enables a man to run without being weary than it is that it enables him to mount up with wings as eagles. But the finest proof of all of the power of that grace lies here, that it enables a man to walk without being faint. That is the splendid climax of the whole. The prophet has said the last word about the 'sufficient grace of God' when he says that when the soaring and the running are all over, it still keeps a man trudging it along the narrow way of duty without halting or wavering, step after step, day after day, 'walking without being faint.'

For the 'soaring' and the 'running' of the text may well represent our times of rapture and vision and sanguine hope, while the 'walking' represents the daily drudgery and routine of life; and while it is a fine thing to have our times of rapture and vision, it is a still finer thing when the rapture has disappeared, and the vision has faded, and life has become dull and grey and commonplace; it is a still finer thing to be true to the Christian ideal then, to follow and obey Christ bravely then, to cling to one's vows and good resolves then; 'to walk without being faint.' And so, as Dr. G. A. Smith says, we have here 'a natural and true climax, rising from the easier to the more difficult,

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from the ideal to the real, from dream to duty, from what can only be the rare occasions of life to what must be life's usual and abiding experience.'

Friederick W. Robertson, of Brighton, preached a notable sermon upon what he terms the 'illusiveness of life.' It is founded upon that text in the Hebrews which says that Abraham set out for a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance. He left Ur, as he thought, to receive a country, and yet he died a homeless wanderer, owning nothing in the land but a grave. Now, it was a fine proof of the strength supplied by God's grace that Abraham was able to leave Ur of the Chaldees, to turn his back upon kindred and friends and home. But Abraham had a radiant vision to sustain and encourage him then ; he had a glorious hope to hearten him then. Those were the days when Abraham mounted up with wings as eagles, and ran without being weary.

But it is a far finer proof of the sustaining and strengthening power of the grace of God that Abraham never returned to Ur. His glowing vision soon vanished ; his radiant hopes were soon disappointed. It became evident to him that Canaan would never be his, but that he would be a stranger and a pilgrim to the end of his days. And yet the old man never dreamed of going back. In spite of the shattering of his dreams and the collapse of his hopes, he staggered not at the promise because of unbelief ; he continued

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steadfastly in his God-appointed way, not soaring or running perhaps, but walking doggedly and without fainting. That, under the impulse of a great enthusiasm and a radiant hope, Abraham should leave Ur is not nearly so wonderful an illustration of the power of the grace of God as that, amid the stern and bitter and disappointing realities of experience, he should still hold without wavering to his first purpose.

And similar illusions occur in the life of us all, says Robertson. 'Life is a deception ; its anticipations are never realized ; it is a series of disappointments.' We all start life full of high enthusiasms and lofty hopes. We set glorious ambitions before ourselves, and are confident of realizing them. But the years bring their disappointments to us, and we are soon taught the humbling lesson that we are not going to carry things with a rush, as we thought. And then comes the temptation to abandon our early ambition, or at any rate to lower it to the standard of the everyday world. And it is the final evidence of the power of the grace of God, that amid the disillusionment of life, when the radiance has gone out of our dreams and the glow from our hopes, that it still keeps us faithful to our first and holiest ambitions, not soaring or running, perhaps, but still 'walking without being faint.'

The United States in 1861 took up the sword in the cause of the negro. A wave of passionate



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enthusiasm for the cause of the downtrodden and the oppressed swept over the land, and from every town and village in the Northern States there went young men to fight the negro's battle, singing as they went—

‘John Brown’s body lies a’ moulderin in the grave,  
But his soul goes marching on.’

I admire the United States in those days of splendid enthusiasm and hope at the beginning of the war, when she mounted up with wings as eagles, and ran, and was not weary. But I frankly confess I admire that great nation still more in the later stages of the conflict ; when the terrible realities of war came home to her ; when it became apparent that the deliverance of the negro was likely to be a long, costly, and bloody business ; when, in spite of defeat after defeat, she stuck doggedly to her task, sending regiment after regiment and army after army into the field, bating not a jot or tittle of her resolve ; not soaring or running now, perhaps, but still ‘walking, and not faint.’ To be faithful in difficult times is a harder thing than to be enthusiastic in bright and prosperous times. An outburst of heroism is not nearly so fine a thing as patient continuance in well-doing in the daily and commonplace routine of life. And so the grace of God, which begins by enabling man to soar, reaches its glorious climax when it enables him to walk without being faint.

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And to this supreme feat of enabling men to walk without fainting the grace of God is equal. 'They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall walk, and not faint.' Life's disillusionments and disappointments cannot make them swerve from their purpose. When life has lost its zest, its glamour, its radiance, and has become dull and hard and grey, they still remain steadfast and unmovable—faithful unto death. God's grace is sufficient, I say, even in face of the stern, bitter facts of experience. Some of the ardour and enthusiasm and eagerness may disappear, perhaps, but still it enables men to walk, and not faint.

I. Let me give two or three illustrations of this truth. I will take first the history of the Christian Church. If you will look up the Book of the Acts of the Apostles when you go home, and read what is there said, I think you will find that there was about the primitive Church a spontaniety, an enthusiasm, a buoyancy that are wanting in the Church to-day. We come again and again across notices of this kind: 'And day by day continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.' The early Church, though small in number, and planted in the midst of an unbelieving world, was a *glad* Church, a praising Church, I was going to say a *light-hearted* Church. In those early days the

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Church mounted up with wings as eagles, and ran and was not weary.

The 'gladness' and enthusiasm of the early Church was partly due to inexperience of the world, and partly also to a glorious hope that filled the horizon of these early Christians. I say it was partly due to an *inexperience of the world*. These first believers, in the simplicity of their souls, thought that they had only to proclaim their message, and the world would at once accept it. They had seen the marvellous results that had followed the preaching of Peter on Pentecost, and they anticipated similar results everywhere. They did not reckon with the perversity of the human heart. They did not imagine that men would reject the message and slay the messenger. And it was also due to *a beautiful hope* that filled their horizon and possessed their souls, the hope, namely, that before many years had passed Christ would come back, and take unto Him His great power and reign. And with this simple belief of theirs in the power of the gospel and their cherished hope of the speedy coming of Christ, these early Christians were joyous, light-hearted, enthusiastic.

But the belief and the hope were both doomed to disappointment. Men did not receive the gospel as they expected they would. Instead of having their message welcomed, Christians found themselves brought to the stake and the block and the arena. Instead of coming back within

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the lifetime of the early Christians, nineteen centuries have passed, and still the Lord delays His coming. The dreams and hopes of the early Christian Church have been disappointed. She now sees herself confronted by a hostile world. She has an altogether new sense of the strength of sin. She knows that the world is at enmity with God. She realizes, further, that her task is a long and toilsome one. She looks at the vice and sin at home and the heathenism entrenched abroad, and she foresees, not a speedy triumph, but ages of conflict and battle and travail.

With the loss of the early belief in the speedy and easy triumph of the gospel the Church has lost her light-heartedness and gaiety. She no longer soars and runs.

And yet she 'walks without fainting' and without any wavering, but with dogged resolution has set herself to the task of bringing the whole world into subjection to the rule of Jesus. And beautiful though the soaring enthusiasm of the early Church was, I will venture to say that the fact that the Church of to-day—awake to the difficulties and dangers of her high enterprise—still walks without fainting towards her goal is a still more wondrous illustration of the sustaining and strengthening power of the grace of God.

II. And what is illustrated in the history of the Christian Church on the large scale is illustrated within smaller compass in the experience of *every*

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*Christian minister and Christian worker.* When we enter Christ's service, what dreams we dream and what hopes we cherish! We all begin by believing we are going to do wonders. We say to ourselves that it is the business of the Christian worker to turn the world upside down, and, like the negro preacher, we say to ourselves that we are the men to do it. Every Christian minister begins by expecting some sort of millennium to come as the result of his toil. I am not blaming men for cherishing such glorious hopes. It is only the cynic who sneers at the illusions and enthusiasms of youth. For my own part, I am sorry for the man who has no gorgeous visions, no daring hopes of this kind. But, as a matter of fact, that is how we all begin—with high hopes. The early days of our service are days of enthusiasm and amazing hopefulness. 'We mount up with wings; we run, and are not weary.'

But we are not long in the work before the disappointments begin. We find that somehow the millennium does not come, and men are far more hard and obdurate than we took them for. Instead of turning the world upside down, we find the world too much for us. We begin to feel that in all our attacks upon it we are but battering ourselves against a stone wall, and so sometimes we are tempted to say with Elijah, 'I have spent my strength for nought and in vain,' and abandon the work in despair. But that same grace of God

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which kindled our first enthusiasm can also enable us to hold on our way in spite of non-success, doing our duty bravely, whatever may be the result of it. The light-heartedness and first ardour may disappear, perhaps ; we shall no longer soar or run ; but we shall 'walk without fainting,' and we shall remain, in spite of all the discouragements, steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

And fidelity, in spite of discouragement and difficulty, is a far nobler gift of the grace of God than the enthusiasm of inexperience. A Congregational minister was, I believe, the subject of that well-known short poem of Matthew Arnold—

‘Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead  
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,  
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen  
In Spitalfields, looked thrice dispirited.  
I met a preacher there I knew, and said,  
“Ill and o’erworked, how fare you in this scene?”  
“Bravely!” said he, “for I of late have been  
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the living Bread!”

Amid the squalor and vice and sin of London that preacher fared bravely. He did not abandon his work for its difficulty. He was not driven into despair by its vastness and apparent hopelessness. Realizing the awful power of sin, he yet held on his course, doing his level best for Christ, ‘walking without fainting,’ strengthened by the living Bread. And we, too, brethren, may fare ‘bravely’ in our work if we seek strength in the same way. Patient

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fidelity is a nobler thing than an outburst of enthusiasm. And that grace of patient fidelity, so necessary for our work, we can get from our Lord. If we will but wait upon God, then, however difficult our work and manifold its discouragements, we shall 'walk without fainting.'

III. And the truth I am seeking to enforce is still further illustrated by the contrast between *youth* and *age*—Christian youth, I mean, and Christian age. There is all the glory and freshness of a dream about Christian youth. It is winsome and beautiful in its hopefulness, its fervour, its buoyancy. I look at the young Christian with his simple faith, his enthusiasm, his headlong zeal, and I am sometimes tempted to think earth does not contain a fairer sight. 'They mount up with wings as eagles ; they run, and are not weary.'

And yet there is one thing more beautiful than an enthusiastic young Christian, and that is a faithful *old* Christian. It is a glad sight to see the young pilgrim entering with enthusiasm upon his course, stripping with eager hopefulness for the race. But it is a still more beautiful sight to see an old man, who has borne the burden and heat of the day, still pressing toward the mark, marching boldly and bravely, even though his step be slow—'walking without fainting.' Paul the aged is a finer and more beautiful sight than young Timothy. It is a joyous sight to see a young man beginning the Christian life. But it is a still finer

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sight to see an old and white-haired man who has known the difficulties of the Christian life—who has faced trial and sorrow and death; it is a still finer sight to see him still clinging to his faith, still pressing towards the Lord. He does not soar or run, perhaps, but he ‘walks without fainting.’

And the grace of God which kindles the first flame of enthusiasm and love in our souls is equal also to this greater task. It can enable us to *endure to the end*. In the history of Christianity many have begun, and were not able to finish. Their early enthusiasm was like the flame of straw—one fierce blaze, and over. John Mark was all eagerness to be a missionary, but departed from Paul and Barnabas in Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. Demas forsook Paul, having loved this present world. The young man in the Gospels went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. But the grace of God can keep us to the end. Some of the buoyancy may be taken out of us by the hard experiences of life, but we shall never falter in our course. ‘They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall walk, and not faint.’

IV. The text also illustrates the relation between *communion and daily duty*. ‘They that wait upon the Lord,’ says the prophet, ‘shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.’ They shall have their moments of exaltation and vision and high communion. They shall



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be carried into the seventh heaven ; they shall hear things that cannot be uttered ; their souls shall be so ravished within them that whether in the body or out of the body they cannot tell. These moments of rapture and vision are the precious rewards of those who wait upon God. ‘They shall mount up with wings as eagles.’ But there is one result of waiting upon God still finer and more precious—‘*they shall walk, and not faint ;*’ i.e. they shall be made strong to bear up against the fret and care of life ; they shall be strengthened to be Christ’s servants in the everyday toil and drudgery of life. The result of waiting upon God is a consecrated and ennobled daily life, and that is a greater and a better thing than ‘rapture.’

It is a comparatively easy thing to kindle religious emotions, but what we find terribly difficult is to live the Christian life. We have our moments on the mount ; our difficulty comes when we go back on the morrow to our shops, our businesses, our offices. To be a Christian tradesman—that is where the difficulty comes. To be a Christian workman or servant—that is where the difficulty comes. To be a Christian employer—that is where the difficulty comes. Is not that so, brethren ? To Christianize your everyday duty, your daily walk and conversation, is a task so hard that you sometimes despair of it. But listen to this promise : ‘They shall walk, and not faint.’ They shall be able to Christianize the daily round, the common

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task. Whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they shall be able to do all to the glory of God.

And that is the question I would like to put to you. What of the daily routine? You have your times when you mount up with wings as eagles; but when you come back to earth again are you able *to walk without fainting*? You enjoy services like these; but to-morrow will you do your duty faithfully, squarely, honestly? Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, will you do it with your might? Will you put your religion into the routine and drudgery of life? Rapture is good, but duty honestly done is better still.

‘The longer on this earth we live,  
And weigh the various qualities of men,  
Seeing how most are fugitive  
Or fitful gifts at best of now and then,  
Wind-wavered corpse lights, daughters of the fen;  
The more we feel the high, stern-featured beauty  
Of stern devotedness to duty,  
Steadfast and still, nor paid with mortal praise;  
But finding amplest recompense  
For life’s ungarlanded expanse  
In work done squarely and unwasted days.’

And for that best thing—plain devotedness to duty—the grace of God can and will equip you. ‘They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall walk, and not faint.’

## X

### Lengthening and Strengthening

*‘Lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.’—ISA. liv. 2.*

THIS splendid and glowing chapter is a magnificent example of prophetic faith. The people were exiles in what looked like a hopeless captivity. Yet this chapter throbs and burns with the prophet’s passionate conviction that many years shall not pass before he and his are restored again to their native land. His nation had been overwhelmed with disaster and political extinction, and when the people had been deported beyond the Euphrates, it looked as if the last chapter in the history of Judah had been written, and that its very name had been blotted out for ever from the roll-call of nations. But in this chapter the prophet dares to predict for that ruined, desolate and well-nigh extinguished kingdom, a future greater even than its heroic past.

Judah’s capital, Jerusalem, had been devastated and laid waste by the ruthless conqueror. It was lying at this very time shattered in heaps. But

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this prophet, with superb and unconquerable faith, dares to speak of a New Jerusalem crowning the crest of Zion, larger, finer, more spacious than the old. And my text forms part of the call addressed by the prophet to the people in view of the splendid destiny before them. He bids them prepare for it. He summons them to make ready for these greater days to come. 'Enlarge the place of thy tent,' he cries, 'and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not: lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt spread abroad on thy right hand and on thy left; and thy seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.'

Referring, as these words primarily do, to the restoration of the Jews to their native land, this prophecy may be said to have received its fulfilment in the Return. And yet men turn to it still, as a prophecy of things yet to come. And they are right; for this is a case in which the prophet spoke larger and better than he knew. The seventy-second Psalm, says Delitsch, was originally meant to celebrate the glories of Solomon's reign. It is the righteousness of Solomon, the clemency of Solomon, the far-spreading rule of Solomon, that form the theme of that splendid song. And yet throughout the centuries the Church has persisted in regarding that Psalm as Messianic. Originally meant for Solomon, we feel Solomon does not satisfy or answer to its glorious predictions; yes,

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instinctively as we read of Him who is to save the children of the needy, who is to come down like rain upon the mown grass, who is to redeem the souls of His people, and who is to have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, we say, 'Behold, a greater than Solomon is here.' These glowing and rapturous verses do not fit a Jewish kinglet, they only fit Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

And in the same way as we read the thrilling verses of this chapter, we feel that, while originally written of the return from Babylon, that return does not exhaust their meaning ; they speak of something nobler far, more important far than the destiny of a few poor, restored exiles. Instinctively men have felt that the prophet here is not speaking simply of the fortunes of the restored Jewish kingdom, but by the Spirit he is speaking of the fortunes of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Only in that kingdom which is to stretch from shore to shore, and is to endure throughout all generations, do the words of this prophecy find their true fulfilment.

This chapter, then, you may say, is to the believing soul an impassioned and thrilling prediction of the everlasting kingdom of Christ. That kingdom is to be no tiny, limited, parochial kingdom. It is to spread on every side. All men shall seek unto it. They shall come from the north, and the south, and the east, and the west, and sit down together in the kingdom of God. Yes,

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men of every kindred, and clime, and colour, and tongue, whose hearts, though they know it not, are athirst for God, the living God, shall come crowding into the Church, they shall throng her gates, they shall take her walls by storm, saying, 'Surely God is in thee, and there is none else, there is no God beside Thee.'

Look back across the perished years, and you will see how for nineteen centuries the kingdom has been slowly but surely coming. Look forward into the years unborn. Everything is hidden from us save this one thing—we see the kingdom coming yet more abundantly. There are those who would have us believe that the kingdom of Christ has reached the zenith of its power. Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome, they say, had their day of power and authority, but each in turn reached its climax, and then fell into weakness and decay. So it is to be, they tell us, with the kingdom of Jesus Christ. He has had His day. He has reached the topmost limit of His power. Henceforth there is only decay and ruin before Him.

But that is not how I interpret the future. I can see no sign of decay about the kingdom of Christ. It is not like the tide which flows and ebbs. It is not like the moon which waxes and wanes. It never knows diminution or eclipse. 'Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.' And that is what I see when I look into the future.

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I see a *growing kingdom*. 'Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?' These are they who, from every country under the sun, are pressing into the kingdom of God. Climb, brethren, the mountain of vision, that you may cast out fear and dread. Climb the Pisgah of the promises of God, that you may rejoice in glorious hope. Moses ascended his Pisgah, and away to the west he saw a tiny strip of country of hills and valleys upon which his eye rested with lingering and wistful fondness. It was 'promised land.' 'There,' said Moses to himself, 'my people shall one day dwell in peace and plenty.' But when I ascend the Pisgah of the promises, wherever I look I see 'promised land.' Not on the west only, but on the north and the south and the east also; it is all 'promised land.' Not Europe and America only, but Africa and Asia, with its vast countries of China and India, and the islands of the sea; it is all 'promised land.' Ascend the mount, brethren, and notice that every inch of this world of ours is 'promised land.' 'The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ;' and with that glorious, inspiring, subduing vision before us, let us bid doubt and fear depart, and let us lift up our hearts—yea, let us lift them up unto the Lord.

As the remnant of Judah had to make ready for the great days in store for them, so we, Christ's people, have to prepare and make ready for the

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glorious days of the coming kingdom. And the preparation we have to make is much the same as that which the Jews of old had to make. 'Enlarge the place of thy tent,' is the Divine exhortation to us; 'let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations; spare not: lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.' Upon which old Matthew Henry remarks, 'The present state of the Church is a tabernacle state; but it is sometimes very remarkably a *growing* state, and so the cords must be lengthened to make room for the incoming multitude, and the stakes must be strengthened proportionately, that they may bear the weight of the enlarged curtains.'

And there you have, as it seems to me, the duty of the Church to-day. What has the Church to do? These two things. On the one hand, it must ever seek larger room and new domains; on the other hand, it must strengthen the things which remain, which all too often are ready to die. On the one hand, we must go in for a policy of aggression and expansion; on the other hand, we must root and ground ourselves ever more firmly in the foundation facts of the faith. On the one hand, we must lengthen our cords; on the other hand, we must strengthen our stakes. And the lengthening and the strengthening must go hand in hand. To strengthen our stakes without lengthening our cords would be to make impossible the high destiny in store for us; to lengthen our



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cords without strengthening our stakes would be to bring disaster upon all our work. Lengthen and strengthen, is the Divine call. Expansion and confirmation, is the double duty.

I. 'Lengthen your cords' is the Divine appeal to the Church. We must enlarge the place of our tent. We must continually be making more room. The danger of the Church is ever to be content with narrow boundaries, to be satisfied with less than God has in store for her. And so, to a Church always ready to sit at ease, God has always to be saying, 'Lengthen thy cords, stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations.' In many directions we must 'lengthen our cords.'

First, and most obvious of all, we must be ever lengthening our cords in the way of *seeking to win new territories and heathen lands* for Jesus Christ. The whole vast missionary enterprise is involved in this command, 'Lengthen your cords.' The Church has not always been ready to do this. It was not ready in the first century. The kingdom the early Christians contemplated was a narrow, limited, parochial kingdom, confined to Jews. 'Lengthen your cords,' was God's summons to the early Church by the dream of the great sheet which He sent to Peter as he slept in Simon the tanner's house, which was by the sea at Joppa. 'Lengthen your cords,' was His summons by the conversion of Cornelius, the Gentile centurion. 'Lengthen your cords,' was His call in the

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outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit upon the despised Samaritans. 'Lengthen your cords,' was His summons by the manifestation of the grace of God among the Greeks at Antioch. 'Lengthen your cords,' was His call to the Church by the lips and the letters and the labours of that greatest of the apostles, Saul of Tarsus.

Again, in the eighteenth century, you see a Church that had forgotten to lengthen its cords. As far as England is concerned, it is practically true to say that the interests of Christian people did not extend further than the boundaries of their own country. Missions were unknown. The heathen of the lands beyond the sea were left to perish in their sins. Indeed, the duty of evangelizing the heathen was disputed and denied. When missions to the heathen were mentioned by a young minister at an association meeting in the Midlands, 'Sit down, young man,' was the answer of the president; 'when God wants to convert the heathen, He will do it without either your aid or mine.' But that young man was not discouraged. When it came to his turn to preach the association sermon, these were his two points, 'Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God.' 'Lengthen your cords,' cried William Carey to a sluggish and unaggressive Church; 'lengthen your cords,' and the missionary labours of the past century are the result.

And still the call comes, 'Lengthen your cords.'

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Much has been done, but more remains to be done. Study your missionary map ; notice the countries still marked black ; remember Christ's words, 'Them also must I bring,' and listen to this call, 'Lengthen your cords.' There are some in the Church to-day who would limit expansion if they could. They tell us we ought not to think of disturbing India and China and Mohammedan countries, which already possess religions eminently suited to the genius of the people. But when I go to my Master, I hear nothing of any limitation of this kind. This is what I hear, 'Lengthen your cords, that China and India, and they of Ethiopia, may come.' 'When are you going to stop?' said his wondering courtiers to Constantine, as he drew the vast outlines of his new city on the Bosphorus. 'When the Divine Guide who marches before me bids me,' was the Emperor's reply. When are we going to stop our aggressive work? Not till the Divine Guide bids us ; and He will not bid us stop till every knee shall bow in the name of Christ, and every tongue confess He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Till then the Church will hear from the lips of her Lord only this summons, 'Lengthen thy cords.'

Then we must be ever lengthening our cords in the way of seeking to bring *daily life more and more under the sway of religion*. Much was done—let us gratefully acknowledge it—during the century that has passed. That was, perhaps, on the whole,

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the most striking religious gain of the century—the recognition of the scope and reach of religion. Time was when religion and daily life were divorced ; when a great gulf divided the Sunday from the week-day ; when life was divided into water-tight compartments labelled respectively, *sacred* and *secular*. The bearing of religion upon business and politics and social relationships was ignored and even denied. ‘Business is business,’ men would say, in apology for conduct which was, to put it mildly, not religious. But now we have come to recognize, as we never have done before, that religion has something to say to every detail and department of human life. Thank God for what has already been achieved in this respect.

But we are still far from the ideal. There are whole tracts of life, both private and public, which are divorced from religion, and God’s call to us is this, ‘Lengthen your cords ;’ bring more and more of life—both public and private—under the rule and sway of Christ. Bring business under the sway of Christ ; put your Christianity into your buying and selling. Inscribe on your desks, and counters, and ledgers, and cash books, ‘Holiness unto the Lord.’ Bring municipal and political life under the rule of Christ. Use your vote, not at the bidding of a party, but at the bidding of your King. Go to the polling booth, not to advance your own interests, but go there as the representative of Christ, resolved, above all things, to

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advance His interests. Bring your social relationships under the sway of Christ. Treat the relation between yourselves and your employes, between you and your servants, not as a mere matter of money, treat it as a religious matter; put your religion into it. Banish the word 'secular' out of your dictionaries. Do not take narrow and contracted views of the scope of your religion. 'Lengthen your cords;' whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Then there must be a lengthening of the cords in the way of opening our minds to receive *the new ideas and the larger truth* that God from age to age reveals. For God does, from age to age, reveal new truth. No one can study the history of the centuries without seeing it. The Spirit is from time to time taking of the things of Christ and revealing them unto us. The man who himself is most alarmed of new ideas to-day, and who talks fondly of the 'Old Gospel,' would have found himself an heretic if he had lived three hundred years ago. Again and again has it proved true, that the heresy of to-day is the orthodoxy of to-morrow. We cripple and maim and injure ourselves when we imprison ourselves within the walls of any orthodoxy, however honoured, and refuse to preserve the open and expanding mind which has ever room to offer to God's latest word. 'Lengthen your cords, brethren.' God has still more light and truth to break forth from His

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Word. Why should we refuse to accept the discoveries and ideas of the past fifty years? Why should we accept as true all that is fifty years old, and neglect and ignore everything that has happened since? Has God ceased to speak to men during the past half-century? Has He suddenly become dumb? No; God still speaks, and fuller light into His mind and purposes is constantly being vouchsafed to men. Therefore let us keep the open and receptive mind. Let us lengthen our cords, and find room for the ever larger truth which the years bring.

II. But we must not only lengthen our cords, we must *strengthen our stakes*. There must be the inward confirmation as well as the outward development. Seek to win heathen countries for Christ; bring more and more of daily life under the sway of religion; keep an open mind for the larger truth; but see to it that the strengthening goes hand in hand and keeps pace with the lengthening; strengthen your hold upon the great Gospel verities, upon foundation truths, upon bottom facts. Strengthen your stakes, the great beliefs of your life; strengthen them, confirm them; in a word, while extending on this side and that, see to it that *you are tightening your own grip upon Jesus Christ*.

Let me impress this upon you: the *lengthening* without the *strengthening* can only issue in disaster. It is at our mortal peril we become broader, unless

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we also become deeper. Unless the heart beats strongly, the whole life is feeble. These are the days of the expansion of England. We have been enlarging our tent and stretching forth the curtains of our habitations. We have added millions of miles of territories and vast populations to our dominions. But it is in vain to add vast territories to the area of the empire. It is in vain to enlarge the place of our tent—by the addition of Egypt and Uganda and the Transvaal—if we are growing feeble and lax and nerveless here in old England, the heart of it all. For England, after all, is the centre of the empire, and if there is weakness here, the whole fabric of empire will sooner or later collapse.

I cannot help wishing that in these rather spread-eagle days there were more men of leading amongst us to press upon the consciences of English people this truth—that unless with this expansion abroad there goes hand in hand a strengthening here at home, unless here in the old land we breed a cleaner, simpler, more sober race, that very increase of empire, in which we to-day glory and rejoice, will some day crush us beneath its intolerable burden. With the outward expansion there must go an inward strengthening, if the empire is to endure. The lengthening and the strengthening must go hand in hand. The higher you carry a tower, the lower you sink the foundation. For every foot of that iceberg that shows above water,

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and glitters like an emerald in the sun, there are nine feet buried in the depths of ocean.

And so is it in religion. There must be foundation work, ground work, strengthening work, along with expansion work.

And I am not sure that this truth has not to some extent been lost sight of, or, at any rate, not had its proper emphasis laid upon it, in the century that is past. Stress was laid upon the first part of my text, 'Lengthen your cords,' and perhaps not enough was said of this equally important second duty, 'Strengthen your stakes.' Let me illustrate what I mean.

I have referred to the great missionary enterprise. Our fathers initiated it, in the absolute conviction that Christ was necessary to the salvation of every man under the sun. They believed simply and from the heart in the apostolic statement, that there is salvation in no other, neither is there any other name given under heaven amongst men whereby they must be saved. Now we still carry on the work they began. Indeed, we have enlarged it. But I do not think I am wrong in saying that to some extent we have lost our fathers' faith in Christ as the one and only Redeemer. Perhaps we do not openly avow it even to ourselves ; still, there is a sort of feeling abroad in the Church that it will come all right with the heathen, somehow. And the result is, the enthusiasm and the ardour have gone out of missionary work. We still keep it up,



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but it drags. The fact is, we have lengthened our cords without strengthening our stakes. And I want to record it as my conviction, that unless we strengthen our stakes, unless there is a return to the simple but whole-hearted faith of our fathers, the work will drag still more, and perhaps utterly collapse.

I might illustrate the same thing in the matter of everyday religion and new truth. We have lengthened our cords. There is more Christian influence in our land than ever there was. We have given a welcome to fresh light. But we did not at the same time strengthen our stakes. We have gained in breadth, but we have lost in intensity and earnestness and force. And that is why, while there is amongst us more practical Christian morality and greater charity of thought, we have been smitten with a kind of blight of impotence and spiritual paralysis.

And the great need of the Church to-day is a 'strengthening of the stakes.' We want a revival of faith *within* the Church, and I believe the outward expansion would soon follow. We want to strengthen the things that remain ; to take a fresh grip of the great and fundamental truths of our religion ; to quicken again our love to Jesus Christ. I am not disposed to multiply shibboleths, or to insist upon the necessity of creeds. But this I will say : A Church that has not some great truth, which with heart and soul it passionately believes

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in, is a doomed Church. Indeed, have we not seen it? The age in which we live has been an age of amiable opinions, of good-natured guesses, of a rosy but shallow optimism. And the result has been sterility and barrenness.

We need a revival of faith. We need to believe again as our fathers believed—in Christ, who is both very God and true Man. We need to believe as they believed, that on the Cross He did something for man which man could never have done for himself, whereby man receives pardon and eternal life. We need to believe as they believed, that on the third day He rose again, bringing life and immortality to light. We need to believe that this Jesus is the one Redeemer of men, the one Saviour of souls, the one Intercessor between God and man, and that to Him men must come if they would have life. We need to believe all this as they believed it, so that we may preach it with the same passionate ardour and conviction wherewith they preached it.

This is the prayer for the Church to-day: ‘Lord, increase our faith.’ We need to tighten our grip upon the elemental truths of the Gospel. We need to strengthen the stakes. When we have done that, power will come—victorious, irresistible, subduing power. ‘For this is the victory that overcometh the world, even *our faith*.’

## XI

### The Elims of Life

*'And they came to Elim, where were twelve springs of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.'*  
—EXOD. xv. 27.

'AND they came to Elim; ' and I verily believe if they had not that day come to this pleasant and restful spot, with its twelve springs of water, and threescore and ten palm trees, the Israelites would never have reached Canaan at all, but would have ended their days as slaves in Egypt. If they had not come to Elim that day, there would have been an end to their journeyings; the Book of Exodus would have stopped short just here; there would have been no nation of Israel, and consequently no history of Israel to be written.

For another experience like Marah, where they well-nigh died of thirst, another experience of burning sand and bitter water, would have taken the heart out of them—would have broken their spirit within them, and they would have abandoned their dream of Canaan in despair, and returned to

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the fleshpots and thralldom of Egypt. Just in the nick of time, shall I say—just in time to save them from surrender, apostasy, and despair—they came to Elim, where were twelve springs of water, and threescore and ten palm trees. And by the springs and palm trees of Elim they not only refreshed their tired bodies, but they revived also their drooping courage and fainting souls.

There are some brave and resolute spirits whom no difficulties can daunt or perils affright. What at first they do intend, that they cling to, to the end. When they set out on some high enterprise, they burn their boats behind them. Opposition, persecution, but hardens and confirms them in their resolution. Danger only provokes their courage, and the hostility of men does but call forth their strength; whatever the trials and dangers they may have to face, they will never retreat. With grim tenacity they cling to their purpose, and, sooner than abandon it, they will lay themselves down and die.

The first Apostles were men of that stamp. When threatened by the rulers with imprisonment, if they dared to preach any more, or teach in the Name of Jesus, 'We cannot but speak,' was their noble and uncompromising reply; and on the morrow they were in the old place in the Temple, preaching to the people with all boldness the Name of the Lord Jesus. Paul was a man of that type. He had resolved to go to Jerusalem for Pentecost;

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but on his way thither, at Cæsarea, his friends besought him not to persevere in his purpose. 'Bonds and imprisonment await thee there,' they said. But Paul was not to be shaken from his purpose by any fear of personal danger. 'What do ye,' he said, 'weeping and breaking my heart? I must go—I must go, for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the Name of the Lord Jesus.'

Martin Luther was a man of that type. When summoned to appear before the Diet at Worms to answer for his Protestant opinions, his friends besought him not to go, and reminded him of the tragic fate that had overtaken John Huss under similar conditions at Constance. 'I will go,' was the Reformer's intrepid reply—'I will go to Worms, though there were as many devils there as there are tiles upon the housetops.' John Knox was a man of that type. When the Archbishop of St. Andrews threatened him with a bullet in his heart if he dared to preach in the parish church of that northern city, 'Go and tell the Archbishop,' said he, 'that I am not solicitous about my life, but I will preach there to-morrow.' George Whitefield was a man of that type. When he first preached on Moorfields all the devil's myrmidons tried to frighten him from his purpose. They assailed the preacher with cries, they made ugly rushes at the frail platform on which he stood, they pelted him with decayed vegetables and rotten eggs and

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stones. But they could not terrify that flaming evangelist. His answer to it all was the announcement that he would preach again in the same place at six o'clock in the evening.

And there were in the Israelitish host some few men of that same high and indomitable spirit ; at least, three who would die rather than surrender their purpose, and those three were Moses and Caleb and Joshua the son of Nun. When Moses and Caleb and Joshua left Egypt, they left it for ever. '*Nulla vestigia retrorsum*,' was their motto, 'Never a step backwards.' They clasped their hands in solemn compact with each other, and vowed that, no matter what difficulties met them, or hardships befel them, they would never return to Egypt. 'Though we die,' they said one to another ; 'though we die in the attempt, we will die with our faces Zionwards.'

But the great majority of the Israelites were not heroes at all, but just ordinary men and women, with all the weaknesses and frailties of ordinary men and women. They had entered upon the exodus under the inspiration of Moses' enthusiasm, and with the full expectation that the march would be one of only a few days, after which would come rest and plenty in Canaan. Theirs was not the high and resolute spirit which no difficulty could daunt or danger terrify. Theirs was not that dogged resolution which would keep them pursuing, even though faint. They were men and

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women soon discouraged, easily daunted, quickly frightened. Every difficulty threatened to create a mutiny, and they had not been gone from Egypt a week before multitudes of them wished they had never started ; and all of them, save that noble and indomitable trio, Moses and Caleb and Joshua the son of Nun, wished themselves well back.

It is related in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles that John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas in their first missionary journey. All went well with Mark while the missionaries stayed in Cyprus, where they enjoyed the favour of Sergius Paulus the governor. But when they came to Pamphylia, face to face with the opposition of men and the dangers of travel—when, in a word, they came into touch with real difficulty, John's courage evaporated ; he wished himself well back in Jerusalem, and he departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

And it was even so with these Israelites. They left Egypt in high spirits ; they shouted and sang as they went ; they extolled to the skies Moses their leader. But when they heard the sound of Pharaoh's pursuing host they fell into deep despair, and they turned upon Moses with reproaches and curses. 'Wherefore hast thou thus dealt with us, to bring us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we spake unto thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians,

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than that we should die in the wilderness.' And had not God interposed on their behalf and overwhelmed Pharaoh and his host with sudden destruction, the exodus of the children of Israel would have ended at the Red Sea, and they would have returned to their brickmaking and bitter bondage.

A few marches from the Red Sea and they came to Marah, hot and parched and panting with the heat and toil of the day. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. And once again the sound of murmuring arose in the camp, and they said, 'Better have lived on in Egypt, than perish of thirst in the wilderness.' But after Marah, God brought them to Elim, where were twelve springs of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and at Elim hope revived, and they grew strong again for the journey. Had the first Marah been succeeded by a second Marah, I verily believe the pilgrims would have lost heart altogether, and would have abandoned their dreams of Canaan in despair. But after Marah came Elim, and at Elim's sweet waters, and underneath the grateful shade of its three score and ten palm trees, they refreshed their weary and fainting souls.

And this is typical of God's dealing with His people. He has always His oases for the comfort of desert travellers; He has His Elims ready for tired and discouraged hearts. And were it not



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for these Elims of life, few of us could travel life's dusty and weary ways successfully. We should faint and languish and die. But God, in His infinite grace, has provided many an Elim on the pilgrim way, where we can refresh our souls and be strengthened to persevere until every one of us in Zion appeareth before God.

John Bunyan, in his immortal dream, has pictured for us the Christian life under the similitude of a journey—a journey from the City of Destruction to the City Celestial. In that journey there are many dangers to be encountered and perils to be faced: the Slough of Despond, the Hill Difficulty, the Valley of Humiliation, Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle. But I notice that John Bunyan, with that inimitable insight of his, and with his truthful interpretation of God's ways, always plants some place of rest and refreshing close by the place of special trial and difficulty. On the other side of the Slough of Despond was Interpreter's House; at the top of the Hill Difficulty was the House Beautiful, where Christian slept in that large upper chamber, whose window opened toward the sun-rising, and whose name was Peace; just beyond the city of Vanity Fair, where Christian suffered so much, was the River of Water of Life with its green trees bearing all manner of fruits; and close upon Doubting Castle were the Delectable Mountains.

It may be that if the journey from the City of

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Destruction to the City Celestial were Sloughs of Despond, and Hills Difficulty, and Valleys of Humiliation, and of the Shadow of Death from its commencement to its close, some brave and steadfast souls, some Great-hearts and Stand Fasts and Valiants-for-truth would face all the perils for the sake of the glory at the far end. But the Great-hearts and Stand Fasts and Valiants-for-truth are but a few, and for the sake of the Mr. Feebles, and Fearings, and Little Faiths, and Ready-to-Halts, the Lord of the way has fixed here and there places of rest and refreshing to help and encourage them on their journey. Ever and again the weary and much-tired pilgrim comes to Elim, where are twelve springs of water, and three score and ten palm trees, and at Elim's wells and beneath its palm trees he refreshes his weary and tired soul.

I. Let me mention some of these Elims of life—resting-places which strengthen us for our journey. And the first is *the home*. What a place of refreshing is the home! Our experiences in the great world are often hard and painful enough. People misinterpret us. They take advantage of us; they say unkind and uncharitable things of us. In a thousand ways they chafe and irritate and hurt us. But we come home in the evening, and as soon as we cross the threshold we find ourselves bathed in an atmosphere of love. Whatever people may think and say of us outside,

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there are appreciation and sympathy and love for us at home. The world may be a Marah to us, but each evening God brings us to Elim, to the place where the clear waters spring and the palm tree grows.

I have thought often of that last week Christ spent on earth. What a hard and painful and bitter week it was for Him! Each day He went into Jerusalem to teach, and each day He had to face the bitter hate and opposition of scribes and elders and priests. They tried to thwart Him, they tried to corner Him, they tried to catch Him in His words. In every conceivable way they fought Him and tried to ruin His work. I sometimes try to conceive what Christ's sorrow and pain must have been; but I cannot find words to express it. I know that every day that week He lived in Marah, and the waters of Marah were very bitter. And I have wondered sometimes how it was Christ had strength to return day after day and drain that bitter cup. But I remember He, too, had His Elim. 'And it being now evening,' I read in Mark's Gospel, 'He went out unto Bethany with His twelve.' And Bethany was Christ's Elim. The spring and the palm tree were there. There were refreshing and rest for Him there. There were sympathy and love for Him there. It was Marah for Him all day in Jerusalem, where priests and elders catechized Him, thwarted Him, opposed Him; but each night He found His Elim in the

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home at Bethany, where Martha made Him a great feast, and Mary took an alabaster box and broke it. And the love and sympathy of Bethany strengthened Him for the conflict and struggle of Jerusalem.

And what the home at Bethany was to Christ, our homes have been to us. What sustained Charles Kingsley in his strenuous and eager life? He was in advance of his times. He was misunderstood, he was slandered, he was abused. What sustained him through it all? Well, this in part—his home. Whatever the great world might say of him, there was a wealth of love waiting for him at home. Eversley Vicarage was Charles Kingsley's Elim, where the sweet waters flowed and the palm trees flourished.

Do you thank God for your *homes*? Do you thank God for this Elim at the close of every day's pilgrimage? Do you thank God for the love of wife and the caress of your little child? Do you thank God that, whatever the world may think of you, and however poor and mean a creature you may be, there are some within the walls of your house who think the whole world contains no one like you, who love you with an undying love? Do you thank God for all this? If you have not done so hitherto, begin to thank God in every prayer you offer for this daily Elim—for the love and sympathy and sunshine of the home.

II. And the next Elim is the *sabbath and the*

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*sanctuary.* What a time of refreshing is the sabbath! What a place of refreshing is the house of prayer! The world with its disappointments and business cares and anxieties—how wearing it is to the spirit! But every seven days we come to Elim—the place of rest and refreshing and renewal, the place where are twelve springs of water and three score and ten palm trees. We say, ‘It is the pace that kills.’ The pace would be still more killing if the weekly day of rest should disappear. The world would become a world of tired and worn-out men and women. But, thank God, the sabbath is still ours, and every week the wearied toiler comes to his Elim—his day of refreshing and rest.

But the sabbath is not the Elim it might be to us, unless it brings us into the sanctuary to seek God’s face. I do not depreciate or minimize or underrate the value of the mere physical rest which this day brings. Thank God for twenty-four hours’ respite from labour of hand and brain! But the hand and the brain are not the only things that get tired. I know something worse than a tired hand, and that is a tired heart. I know something worse than a weary brain, and that is a weary soul. And people everywhere are carrying about within them tired hearts and weary souls. The sabbath in itself is no cure for a weary heart; but if on the sabbath men and women come into the sanctuary, they ‘shall lay down the burden and

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the care.' For Christ is to be found here, and when men come to Christ they find rest unto their souls.

I know a little chapel in my own native land, out away in the country, far away from village and town. But every sabbath from miles around the farmers and farm labourers gather in the little building to hear the gospel preached. Their lives are hard and monotonous enough ; but they find peace, joy, love, in the little chapel, and because of what it has been to them they have called it 'Elim.' There the name stands graven over the door—Elim—the place of springing water and shady palm trees. And that is what the sanctuary always is to the humble worshipper. Whether it is called by the name or not, it is an Elim to him. I read in the old Book of one who was sore distressed by the difficulties and troubles of life. They harassed him and well-nigh drove him to distraction. And it seemed as if the trouble would crush and overwhelm him—until—notice that—until he went into the sanctuary, and then the trouble all disappeared and his heart was filled with the peace of God. 'I came to church tired,' wrote one to me only last week, 'I came to church tired, and not a little soul weary ; I left rested, refreshed, strengthened ; I met my Lord there.'

And many of us have had again and again a like experience. We have come tired, and gone away refreshed ; we have come harassed, and gone

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away peaceful ; we have come sorrowful, and gone away comforted ; we have come troubled and perplexed, and gone away enlightened ; we have come burdened with guilt and sin, and at the Cross have found deliverance and release. You, men and women, with the tired hearts, have you found the sanctuary an Elim to you? It is not enough to listen to the preacher ; it is not enough to come within the four walls. Your presence in the building, your listening, will not bring you the refreshing of soul you need. But if you seek Christ—and He is to be found here—He will give you the rest you seek. ‘Come unto Me,’ He cries, ‘all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ Seek Him, brethren ; seek Him *now*, seek Him always, and this sanctuary will always be an Elim to you, for He will give rest unto your souls.

III. Another Elim is the *place of private prayer*. The sabbath, with its call to enter the sanctuary, comes but once in seven days. But we need not wait for the return of the sabbath in order to have refreshing fellowship with our Lord. For He will meet us in the place of secret prayer. ‘Enter into thy closet, and shut to thy door, and pray to thy Father which is in secret,’ and your very chamber shall become an Elim to you, a place of rest and refreshing, a place of palm trees and running streams. Our Lord was a diligent and regular worshipper at the synagogues. Between the sabbaths He would retire to the mountain to pray.

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The mountain-top, the wilderness, the olive-garden, were Christ's secret chamber; and the mountain-top and the wilderness and the olive-garden proved veritable Elims to Him; for I read that angels came and ministered unto Him; yes, angels came from heaven and strengthened Him.

And in like manner our bedchamber and our studies may become Elims to us. God will meet with us *there*, speak to us *there*, strengthen us *there*. Do you often seek the place of private prayer? Do you enter into your closet and shut to the door? Do you delight in quiet, loving fellowship with your Master? 'Pray without ceasing,' said the Apostle. Do you pray without ceasing? What is prayer to you, brethren? Is it something you hurry through—something you are anxious to finish as quickly as possible? Or is it vital breath to you? What kind of a tale does the carpet at your bedside tell? What kind of a revelation does your Bible make? I see Christians limping and halting painfully along, dragging one foot wearily after the other; it is always desert and blazing sun with them, and all the time there is an Elim at their doors, if they only knew it. A man has but to enter into his closet and shut to the door, and on the instant he is in Elim.

I am convinced one reason of our rather feeble and joyless Christian life is that we are not often enough in the place of secret prayer. Do you find the way long? Do you find the road dreary? Do



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you find the life hard? Be instant in prayer, and all that will end. Be instant in prayer, and difficulties will vanish and weariness will pass away. Let a man but step aside for half an hour's converse with his Lord, and he will find himself in Elim; and having drunk of its clear waters and rested beneath its shade, he will go on his way rejoicing, and shall pass from strength to strength and come at last with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy upon his head.

IV. But these Elims come and go. We cannot remain in the place of secret prayer, we must perforce go forth to the office and the shop and the bench. We cannot remain in the sanctuary.

‘Life's tumults we must meet again,  
We cannot at the shrine remain.’

And in this respect we are like the Israelites. Oh, it was good to come to Elim, with its springs and palm trees. But, as old Matthew Henry says, ‘they only encamped there for a time. It was not their abiding city.’ They had soon to remove from beautiful Elim, and in the very next verse I read that their next halting-place was in the Wilderness of Sin, when once again their trouble was so sore that they wished themselves dead. And so with us; from the Elim of the sanctuary and the sabbath and the place of private prayer, we too pass out into the Wilderness of Sin, into the toil and conflict and strife of life.

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Have you not, brethren, when enjoying the delights of Elim, said, like Peter on the mount, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here,' and in your heart desired there for ever to abide? Well, there is an Elim at the end of the journey from which we shall never remove. And the Elims we enjoy below give but faint hints and suggestions of the joy and bliss and peace that will be ours in the Elim that awaits us above. It, too, is a place of streams and trees, for through the midst of the city there floweth the river of Water of Life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb; and on either side of the river is the Tree of Life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, and yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And in that blessed Elim they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat. No storms beat upon that Elim; no trouble breaks its peace; no tears ever fall. There is neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain, nor death; for the former things are passed away. There it is ever sacred, high, eternal noon; there it is everlasting music and song.

'There we shall see His face,  
And never, never sin;  
There, from the river of His grace,  
Drink endless pleasures in.'

And from that blessed Elim there will be no removal. It will be our everlasting home.

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Will your journey end in that Elim? We are every day coming nearer the end of our pilgrimage. What, brethren, is it to end in? What is it to end in? I should grudge every passing hour, I should hoard my days as a miser hoards his gold, I should break my heart over every white hair in my head, and every other sign of advancing age, did I not know that Elim was at the end. But, as it is, I can say with Paul, that though my outward man is decaying, yet I neither grieve nor repine, for I look forward to the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for me.

Where will your journey end? Have you the blessed assurance that it will end in the Heavenly Elim? Have you that glorious hope before you? Would you not like to have it? Then seek your Lord's face now, give yourselves to Him body, soul, and spirit now, and He will give you an abundant entrance to the Everlasting City at the last! Let us one and all fall upon our knees just now and pray—

'In mercy, Jesu, bring us,  
To that dear land of rest,  
Where Thou art with the Father,  
And Spirit ever blessed.'

## XII

### The Divine Judgment

*'From which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place.'*—  
ACTS i. 25.

THE story of the first vacancy in the Apostolate is a tragedy. One of that little chosen band of twelve turned traitor ; he sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver, and then, stricken with torturing remorse, he went out and hung himself. And the place where the tragedy happened is called in the Hebrew tongue Aceldama, 'the field of blood,' unto this day. And after that what became of Judas? Well, this is what Scripture says about the fate of the traitor—'He went to his own place.'

We might have expected that all the figures of dread and all images of terror would have been heaped together to describe the end of him who betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Mediæval Christianity did, as a matter of fact, employ every terrible figure imagination could invent to describe the doom of Judas. Dante, for instance, divides his hell into nine circles ; and in the fourth division of the ninth

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circle, where the torture is keenest and most awful, there he places Judas. But how simple Scripture is! How calm and quiet its language; how restrained and severe its speech! Dante ransacks his mighty brain for fearful figures to describe the terrible doom of Judas. But Scripture satisfies itself with this simple, solemn sentence: 'He fell, that he might go to his own place.' How simple the words are, and yet how awful! Dante's lurid lines about the tortures of Judas do not fill me with terror as does this restrained but solemn Scripture sentence. The worst and most hardened sinner can meet with no punishment more dread than this—to be sent to his own place.

'That he might go to his own place!' Then there had been a time when Judas occupied a place that was *not* his own? Yes, there had. That was the time when he made one of that chosen band of twelve who companied with Jesus. Judas among the Apostles was a man out of place, and Jesus, at any rate, knew it. Very likely the eleven thought Judas had as much right to be in the company of Jesus as any one of them. They were deceived by his specious exterior, and could not read his black and treacherous heart. But Jesus knew what was in man. He had read this false disciple of His through and through. 'Have I not chosen you,' He said one day, 'and one of you hath a devil?' Yes, a very devil had crept into the inmost circle of the disciples. Amongst the faithful there was

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one faithless ; amongst the Apostles there was one traitor ; amongst the men whom Jesus called to be His friends, there was one ready to sell Him for a few paltry pieces of silver. If ever a man was 'out of place,' surely Judas was out of place among the twelve ; surely this man with the false and treacherous heart was out of place among the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus. For two years at least Judas had occupied a place that was not his own.

But deception cannot last for ever. It ends at death. Then the reign of reality begins. Then every man *appears* what he is, and occupies the place he deserves. Judas hung himself, and then he went—not to heaven, to be with the Master he had so cruelly betrayed ; nor does the Scripture say, to hell—he went to his own place, the place he was fit for ; the place his own life had prepared for him.

Is there any lesson for us in this solemn statement of the text ? In these words we have—shall I say?—the principle of the Divine judgment. This is what happens at the judgment—every man finds his own place ; every man occupies the station he deserves ; every man joins the company he loves. That is the principle of the Divine judgment—every man finds his level and goes to his own place.

I. *Reversals of human judgment.*—The Divine judgment is often a reversal of the human judgment. Our Lord Himself has said that there are

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first who shall be last, and there are last who shall be first. There are some who will be ordered out of their lofty seat and told to give some other man place ; there are others who will hear the summons, ' Friend, come up higher.' Dives, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, will make his bed in hell ; and Lazarus, the beggar who sat at his gate, will lie in Abraham's bosom. We read in the papers about appeals from a lower court to a higher, and sometimes it happens that the decision of the higher court reverses that of the lower. So in the case of men there is an appeal from the judgment of the world to the infallible judgment of God. And oftentimes God's judgment is a complete reversal of the human judgment. And the reason of this is, that every man *here* is *not* in his own place. Men are deceived by appearances, and place men in positions for which they are not fit. But all that will come to an end when we stand before the bar of God. God trieth the hearts. He reads the souls. The *real* man, the man who is known only to himself and to his God, will then be revealed, and he will go to his own place—the place he really deserves ; he will go to live with those to whom he is truly akin.

Often in this life men are 'out of place.' In matters of trade and business, in the selection of a calling in life, men often find themselves 'out of place.' By force of circumstances men often find

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themselves condemned to uncongenial employments. And even when choice is possible mistakes are often made, and square men by some mischance get into round holes. If every man did find his proper sphere, the world would be an ideal world, and things would go on smoothly and pleasantly, instead of bumping and jolting along as they do at present. How often we hear the remark, 'So-and-so has missed his vocation.'

In every walk of life, in every trade, in every profession, there are some very obvious 'misfits.' We look at the man, and then at the work he is doing, and we say, 'That man is quite out of place.' Yes, there are men 'out of place,' 'misfits,' in every workshop in the country ; there are 'misfits' behind the counter, in the lawyer's office, at the bar, in the pulpit. Some men are too big for their places, and some are too little. We see ability neglected, we see incompetence enthroned. We settle things in a very rough-and-tumble kind of way. The teaching of events enables us to correct our most glaring mistakes, and the occasion sometimes produces the man. But blunders we shall continue to make to the end of the chapter, for the simple reason that we are men. We are bound to judge by outward appearances, and appearances are often deceptive. Our judgments are never perfect. Though men be ever so careful, they will make mistakes, and put men in positions for which they are not fit.



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The same truth holds *in the moral and spiritual sphere*. Here, again, we are compelled to judge by appearances, and hence are always liable to be deceived. Here, again, there are 'misfits.' We give to such a man a reputation for piety and goodness. It is a reputation he does not really deserve. He has deceived us by a specious exterior. For remember what the old Book says about Satan clothing himself as an angel of light, so as to deceive even the elect. Judas was not in his proper place among the twelve. The people thought he was a devoted disciple. They were utterly and grossly deceived. In the company of Jesus Judas was 'out of place.'

The old proverb which says that a man is known by the company he keeps, is half truth, half falsehood. It may be a deliberate device to keep the real man hidden. We are reminded from time to time that men make a cloak of religion in order to be the better able to cheat and swindle and fleece their fellows. It does not necessarily follow that a man is good because he frequents the company of good men, or that he is religious because he frequents religious services and sits down at the Lord's table. Judas was a devil, though for two years he companied with Jesus. And there are men of the Judas type alive still, men who affect religion, men who are constant attendants upon religious worship, men who are prominent in religious circles, who in their hearts have enthroned

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not Christ but the world, who, while observing the form of godliness, utterly deny the power thereof. Hypocrisy is not extinct. The age of make-believe is not yet at an end. The Pharisee—the man punctilious in his observance of religious rites, but with a heart full of wickedness and uncleanness—alas! is with us still. He insinuates himself into the Church roll, into the Diaconate, into the Ministry itself. And we are powerless to prevent this. With our poor human judgment we cannot separate the tares from the wheat; we are compelled to let them grow together until the harvest. We cannot distinguish the true from the false, the genuine from the spurious, the real from the sham.

But a reputation for piety and sanctity, if undeserved, will only avail for the few years of this mortal life. If the piety is skin deep, if the goodness is not of the heart, the mistake will be rectified up yonder. In the white light that streams from the throne deception and make-believe are no longer possible. Man appears what he really is. He will go to the place he is really fit for. He will make his abode with the things he really loves. He shall go to *his own place!*

There will be some strange reversals of human judgments in heaven! Our Master Himself forewarns us of them. He tells us we shall find publicans and sinners there, the very scum and filth of the world, and some of the children of the Kingdom cast out. He tells us there are teachers

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and preachers who will come to Him and say, 'Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' and He will deny any knowledge of them; He will refuse to acknowledge they have lot or part with Him. 'I never knew you; depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity.'

Heaven, if by God's grace we are privileged to get there, will be full of surprises. We shall see people there whom perhaps we never expected to meet. On the other hand, we shall miss some whom we certainly expected to see. And the reason for the presence of these and the absence of the others is that at length every man has come to his own. We make mistakes *here*. But mistakes are all rectified yonder. *Every man shall go to his own place*. And this is the principle of the Divine judgment. God lets every man find his level, gives him the place for which he is fit; sends him to live with the things he loves.

II. *The judgment not arbitrary*.—We are apt to cherish crude and unworthy ideas of what the last judgment is. We have taken our ideas of it from an earthly court of justice. We have pictured God as the judge pronouncing judgment upon us, and casting us into a hell of His own making. We look upon punishment as something external and arbitrary, and inflicted upon us by another. Without pretending to dogmatize upon so solemn a subject, it seems to me the text gives another.

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and I imagine *truer*, idea of the judgment. It is not God who decides our sentence; we decide our own. 'We are ourselves both judge and jury and prisoner at the bar.' This is the judgment—letting the heart tell out its secrets, letting the REAL man be seen; this is the doom—sending a man to his own place, to live with those things which in his heart he has cherished. Who is it that decides what a man's place shall be? I will tell you. Not God! no, not God. We ourselves decide that. There is nothing capricious or arbitrary about the judgment. The heart will declare what things we loved and cherished here on earth, and *there*—among those things—will be our place. It is our own hearts that either justify or condemn us.

Would that you could realize how solemn and vital a truth this is! We all hope somehow or other to find our way into heaven at last. But there is no getting into heaven by magic. Take this deep statement of that great moralist, Bishop Butler, and ponder over it: 'Habit makes character—character settles destiny.' Character settles destiny. Where you shall be depends on what you are. Whether you shall enter heaven or no depends upon the testimony of your own heart. It will be of no avail to plead that you attended services, that you were even a member of this Church. Your heart will be laid bare, and the object of its affection will be revealed, and that

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will decide what your place is to be. You shall go to live with what your heart loves.

When I realize this, I know what Paul meant when he spoke of the 'terror of the Lord.' For I can conceive of no doom more dreadful than that of being compelled to live in the next world with what our hearts have loved and cherished here. For some have said in their hearts, 'Evil, be thou my good.' With that *evil*, that *sin*, they will have to live there; only sin will have been robbed of every rag and shred of the specious glamour that it wears here, and will be seen for the foul and hideous thing it really is. Oh, what a fate that would be!

I do not know your hearts, but let me draw a bow at a venture. Perhaps you are cherishing some secret sin in your hearts! Think how terrible it will be to have to live with that sin when it has lost its power to please, and retains only its power to torment. There may be some young men here who have let unholy and lustful thoughts run riot in their hearts, who hug and cherish foul and unclean imaginations. Think—think how terrible it would be to have to live with that foul and debasing lust after it has lost all its power to delight, and retains only its power to sting and blister and burn.

I have read somewhere of brutal soldiers who, with a refinement of cruelty, tied living men to rotting corpses. Every man was bound to a dead

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body. Horrible, you say ! Yes, but not so horrible as to be tied to some foul and disgusting sin ; not so horrible as to have that sin for one's inseparable companion. *That* is hell. *That* is the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. And to that hell—it will not be God, but our own hearts that will condemn us. They will declare without reserve or deceit what we love best, and we shall go and live with what we love the best. For we belong to what we love. If we love sin, we shall live with it. But if we love Christ, we shall live with Him. Love to Christ is the key to heaven. The Divine judgment is the ratification of the choice of our own hearts. We shall each of us go, then—to *his own place*.

Look at that little phrase, 'HIS OWN PLACE.' It belonged to him so to speak. Hell was his before he went there. He possessed it. He was familiar with it, he had carried it about with him for years. And this leads me to say this, that whatever our destiny may be, we carry it about with us ; we bear it in our hearts, before we actually enter upon it. Heaven must be in us before ever we can enter heaven. And hell must have possession of our hearts before we can be cast into hell. Heaven and hell begin here. We make a mistake by postponing them till after death.

We are busy to-day and every day making our own heaven, making our own hell. The sinner knows all about the outer darkness and the

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weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth even now. The saint knows all about the Golden City and its streets of gold and its sea of glass and its river of life even now. The man who loves and practises sin is already in torment. The man who loves Christ and seeks after holiness is already acquainted with the river of God's pleasures.

And now comes in the vital importance of daily life, of the acts of every day. I repeat, there is nothing magical, or capricious, or arbitrary about the judgment. We are making our own destinies. The place we shall occupy after death will be *our own*, the place that we have made for ourselves. Think of it, brethren, think of it to-morrow, think of it in the shop and the office; remember that every moment of the day, as you buy and sell, build and plant, write and speak, you are making your own destiny,—building your own place. Our eternal home when we reach it will be—shall I say?—a familiar place.

I remember reading about an eminent minister's first impressions of a visit to Rome. And this was the deepest impression—an impression of familiarity with the city of the Seven Hills. He had read so much about Rome, he had been in imagination there so often, that when he actually stood on the Forum and the Palatine Hill, he felt himself no stranger. And that is how a man feels with his eternal home. He is no stranger to it. The sinner is already acquainted with the outer darkness.

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The saint in imagination has visited the Holy City many a time and oft. He is familiar with its walls, its gates, its streets. He knows its inhabitants. Whether heaven or hell be a man's lot, it is never a foreign country to him ; it is always *his own place*.

His own place, and—shall I add ?—*his own people*. Every man goes to live with those to whom he is spiritually akin. He finds the society for which he is fit. Place a man in a society to which he is unaccustomed, and he is uncomfortable in it. A collier would be unhappy in a West End drawing-room, and so a sinner would be unhappy in heaven. There would be no one there with whom he could converse. He could have no pleasure in the company of the saints, while the vision of Christ would fill his very soul with terror. No ; without are the dogs and the fornicators and the murderers, and whatsoever maketh an abomination and a lie. But those who delight in the saints, who meditate in God's law, who rejoice to do Christ's will—these shall come at last to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Christ the judge of all. Every man *shall go to his own place, and shall join his own people*.

And now suffer a plain question. Each one of us will at the last go to our own place ! What is that place to be ? Look into your own hearts now ; face frankly and honestly the revelation it makes, and tell me *what is your own place*. Your



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heart will tell you. Do not shirk the question. Face it honestly. What is my place at this moment? If God should call me to go to my place, where should I lift up mine eyes? Am I harsh in saying that there are some perhaps in this church to-night who would be *without*?

I feel the terror of the Lord upon me, and because I feel that terror I would fain persuade you. We are not going to get into heaven by some kind of magic. Before we can enter into it, it must be our *own place*. Heaven must be in us before ever we can enter heaven. Christ must live in our hearts before ever we can go to live with Christ. Therefore, I beseech you to set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth; I beseech you to let your citizenship be in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; I beseech you to let every act and word of your life declare to all the world that you seek a better country, even an heavenly. Then 'God will not be ashamed to be called your God. He will prepare for you a city.' When this life is ended you shall go to your own place, to that heaven you have loved, and for which you have lived; to that inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for you.

## XIII

### The Man with the Measuring Line

*'I lifted up mine eyes and saw, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof.'—ZECH. ii. 1, 2.*

I DARE say you are all familiar with the story of the founding of the city of Constantinople. The legend says that the Emperor Constantine was one night encamped upon the site where now the great Eastern city stands, when in his dreams he received a command from heaven to build a new capital for his empire upon that spot. Constantine was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but on the morning of the very next day addressed himself to the task of marking out the boundaries of the new city. On foot, with a lance in his hand, the Emperor himself led the solemn procession, and directed the line which was traced as the boundary of the destined capital. On and on he went, until the vastness of the outline began to astonish and then to alarm his attendants. At last some one, bolder than the rest, ventured to call the Emperor's attention to the wide circuit he was marking out,

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and suggested it was time to stop, as the outline already exceeded the most ample measure of a great city. But Constantine was deaf to their pleading, and continued to press on. 'I shall still advance,' was his reply, 'till He—the invisible Guide—who marches before me thinks proper to stop.'

That old story of Constantine and the building of the city which bears his name may serve to illustrate, partly by way of likeness and partly by way of contrast, Zechariah's prophetic vision. Both the legend and the prophet's vision are concerned with the building of cities. Both emphasize the difference between the ideas of men and the plans of God—the narrowness of human projects, and the wideness of Divine purposes. The story about Constantine illustrates the amazement of men at the vastness of God's designs; the prophet's vision is a protest against any attempt to fetter and belittle those designs by reducing them to the measurement of human ideas and plans.

I. *The vision.*—Let me in a sentence or two explain what the vision was. To understand it we must try to realize the circumstances of the prophet's time. You will remember that Jerusalem had been laid in heaps by the Assyrian invaders. Temple, citadel, walls—all had been laid waste and overthrown, and the people themselves had been carried away captive to distant Babylon. But even in the darkest days of exile the Jews were

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never left wholly without hope. God sent to them prophet after prophet, and the burden of every prophet's message was the same. Unlikely—impossible almost—as the contingency seemed, they all spoke of a 'return,' and announced to these poor heart-broken exiles, sick with longing for their native land, that they should yet come again with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy should be upon their heads. In the year 536 B.C., about fifteen or sixteen years before the date of this prophecy, that unlikely event did actually come to pass, and a small band of exiles, under Nehemiah (Zechariah himself being probably a lad in the company), returned to Jerusalem.

Between numerical weakness and the hostility of relentless foes, the history of the first few years of that little colony, like the history of the first few years of the Pilgrim colony at New Plymouth, was the history of a desperate struggle for life. The sword was always in their hands, and they had small leisure to think of the proper rebuilding and adornment of their city, with the result that there was very little about the Jerusalem of the first ten years after the return to remind any one of the glories of her first estate. However, with the lapse of time there came security and peace, and at the time this prophecy was written—in the year 519 B.C.—men were beginning to think seriously of the rebuilding of the Holy City. That is the subject of the prophet's vision in this chapter. It sets forth

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God's idea of the new Jerusalem. The idea of the Jews was that the new city should be built on the plan and model of the old. It was to be a second edition of the mountain fortress of bygone times. Their ideals of the new Jerusalem never soared above or beyond the Jerusalem of David. A restoration of the former glories was the utmost they dared to hope for.

But God's ways are not men's ways, neither are their thoughts His thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. The Jews had one idea for the new Jerusalem. God had another, and an infinitely nobler one. The new Jerusalem of the Divine purpose was to be no narrow mountain stronghold, no tiny space enclosed within strong walls, but a city that should be the home of countless multitudes of people—a city so great, so vast, so spacious that no ramparts could shut it in ; a city without limit or bound—as the prophet expresses it, without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein.

This vision is really the protest of the prophet against the attempt the Jews were making to narrow down the Divine purposes to the limit of their own paltry plans. In his vision the prophet sees a young man, who stands for the Jewish people, with a measuring line in his hand. The prophet hails the young man, and asks him whither he is going, and what is his errand. The young man

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answers, 'I go to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof.' The young man's notion of Jerusalem was of a city strictly limited, compassable, and measurable, whose dimensions could be stated in so many yards and feet. But that was not God's Jerusalem at all. God's Jerusalem was vast, illimitable, boundless. That is the truth set forth in the angel's reply. 'Run and speak to this young man,' says the one angel to the other—'run and speak to this young man. Tell him he is attempting the impossible. Tell him he is trying to measure the immeasurable. Tell him he might as well try to count the stars in the midnight sky, or the grains of the sand on the sea-shore, or the drops of water in the vasty deep, as seek to measure the Holy City with his tape. Run and speak to this young man—tell him Jerusalem cannot be measured; tell him it is to be no narrow, paltry, mountain fortress; tell him it is to be inhabited as villages, without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein; tell him it is to be a spacious, vast, illimitable city, so that no measuring line on earth is sufficient to compass it.'

The amplitude, the vastness of God's design, and the impossibility of compassing it by any human measurement, that is the superficial and obvious lesson of the text. This is a truth that this proud age needs to learn. If I had to characterize this age in a sentence, I should characterize

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it as an age that believes in the measuring line. We weigh, we test, we measure everything, and what we cannot weigh and test and measure, we refuse to believe in. We are reducing the world to the world that we can touch and see and hear. Men are excluding the eternal, the invisible, the supernatural. They repudiate prayer and miracle and God. Poets and prophets and psalmists found the earth full of wonder and of glory, and of beautiful and sacred mystery. They looked at the stars, and the stars declared the glory of God. They looked at the sea, and the sea to them lay in the hollow of God's hand. They looked at the earth, and they found the earth crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God.

'There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.'

The very commonest things were windows through which men gazed with awestruck eyes into the infinite and the eternal.

But all that, some say, is mere fancy and illusion. The world for them contains no wonder, no mystery. It has no far-stretching distances and unfathomable depths. The crucible and the microscope and the balance unveil the whole secret of the earth. The world is narrowed down to the poor and paltry world of sense. Scientific

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materialism is simply the cult of the measuring line. But, brethren, when a man proceeds with his little scientific measuring line to measure this earth, to tell what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof, he is trying the impossible, he is seeking to measure the immeasurable. The meaning of this world will never be revealed by means of crucibles and lenses and balances. The astronomer can tell us about the composition of a star; he can tell us its size, its distance, its speed of travel. But knowing that, do you know all about the star? How came that star to be, in the first place? Who appointed its orbit? Who keeps it in its place? If you answer me—Law appoints its orbit, and law keeps it in its place, then I want to know who made the law? There at once you get to a question beyond the reach of your scientific measuring line, a mystery that crucibles and balances can never explain. The botanist can tell us all about the structure of the daisy. He can tell us to what species and genus it belongs. He can talk learnedly about calyx, and pistil, and stamen, and all the rest. But having said that, have you explained all about the daisy? Do you not remember Tennyson's lines?—

‘Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,  
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower—but if I could understand



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What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.'

When you come to account for the daisy's life, your measuring line gives out. The secret of *life* has baffled science from the creation even until now. So the simplest things in Nature cover up unfathomable mysteries. Everywhere the seen leads out into the unseen, and the finite into the infinite. The world is more than the narrow world, which can be weighed and tested and measured. It is more than the narrow world, which can be touched and seen. The world of matter opens out into the vast and infinite world of spirit. No measuring line can compass it, for it is ever the case that there is—

'A deep below the deep, and a height beyond the height ;  
Our hearing is not hearing, and our seeing is not sight.'

It is not scientific materialists alone who believe in the measuring line. We are all of us apt to take it in hand. We like to be able to account for everything, to explain everything, to be able to state everything in precise, logical, and exact terms. We are apt to limit the truth to our own understanding of it. We are prone to make our ideas and notions the measure of the Divine purposes. We need to realize the truth—that when we try to apply the measuring line of our own human intelligence to the purposes, plans, and thoughts of God, we are simply trying to measure the

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immeasurable, to limit the illimitable. God's purposes transcend our furthest range of sight. It is still as true as ever it was—that as the heaven is high above the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. Let me further illustrate and, if I can, enforce this truth.

I. First of all, let me illustrate it with reference to the *kingdom of God*. Our Lord came into this world to found a kingdom ; the gospel He preached was the gospel of the kingdom ; and the consummation of His work will be the full and perfect establishment of that kingdom, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. And ever since the kingdom was first preached men have been trying to measure it and define its extent. Men's ideas of the kingdom were that it was a narrow, limited, and parochial concern. The disciples, for instance, born and bred in the notion that the kingdom was limited to the Jews, wanted to take a census of the kingdom, and asked their Master one day : ' Lord, are there few that be saved ? '

But it was after the Lord's death men made the most determined attempt to limit the kingdom. ' They of the circumcision ' went about defining its boundaries. The due observance of Jewish rites was the measuring line they applied. They said it embraced none but Jews. They hung up a sign over the gates, ' No Gentile need apply.'

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They were for reducing the kingdom of Christ to the limits of a tiny Jewish monarchy. But God sent His angel, His messenger—Paul of Tarsus—to tell these men that their paltry measuring line was of no avail. God's kingdom spurned the petty limits they wished to impose. It embraced not Judæa, but the world. It was open, not to one favoured nation, but to people of every nation and clime and colour and tongue. 'Jerusalem, the city of God'—that was Paul's message—'Jerusalem is not a garden walled around—Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls. They shall come from the North and the South and the East and West, and sit down together in the kingdom of God.'

And there is need still to insist upon the wideness of the kingdom, for men are busy still trying to narrow its boundaries. In two ways they are doing that in our own time.

(1) There are those who pretend to believe that Christ's kingdom is confined to certain races. They say Christianity is a Western religion suitable to the Western mind, but that it makes no appeal to the Eastern, whose religious wants are supplied much better by Buddha and Confucius. And so they map out Christ's kingdom, and can tell you over how many square miles of territory Jesus shall reign. They limit the kingdom to Europe and the great continent of the West. But God spurns the limits men would thus impose

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upon Him. He bids men put aside their measuring lines. The kingdom is vast, boundless, universal. Like Jerusalem, it is *without walls*. It knows no boundaries. Like the air and the sunshine, it goes everywhere. Christ has made no partition treaty with any other king. He is to have the dominion from the river to the ends of the earth. He is to have the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. Put up your measuring line. The kingdom has no limits; all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

(2) And the other way in which men seek to limit the kingdom is by confining it *to the limits of a certain Church*. The Romanist uses the measuring line. He counts the number in his Church, and he says, 'This is the number of the subjects of the kingdom.' The Anglican uses the measuring line. He numbers the adherents of his own communion and says, 'This is the number of the subjects of the kingdom here in England.' The Roman Church may be a measurable thing; the Anglican Church may be a measurable thing; but when it comes to the kingdom, your measuring line gives out. The Roman measuring line is not long enough, for we think of such princes in the kingdom as Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, George Herbert and Archbishop Leighton, Charles Kingsley and Frederick Robertson, Denison

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Maurice and Walsham How, who did not belong to her communion. The Anglican measuring line is not long enough, for we think of such great men in the kingdom as John Robinson and John Howe and Richard Baxter; John Bunyan and John Owen and Samuel Rutherford; Robert Hall and Dr. Chalmers and David Livingstone; Angell James and Thomas Binney and Charles Spurgeon, who did not belong to the Anglican communion.

You can measure a sect, a denomination, a particular communion, but the kingdom is larger than any sect, it is larger than all the sects, and the measuring line is useless here. It is vain to erect ecclesiastical party walls, and seek with them to limit the kingdom. Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages *without walls*. The kingdom spurns the limits we seek to impose. It is vast, boundless, limitless. Men of every communion, and of no communion, find a place within it, for the Spirit bloweth where it listeth. The Romanist and the Anglican may give the statistics of their own communion, but the statistics of the kingdom are beyond them. There has been only one privileged to have a glimpse at the subjects of the kingdom. 'I saw,' says John, 'the saints in white robes before the throne of God and of the Lamb.' 'Could you count them, John?' 'I tried,' he answers, 'but I failed; my eye tired, numbers gave out, for they are a multitude from

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every nation, and kingdom, and tribe—a multitude which no man can number.’ ‘Which no man can number.’ The measuring line gives out. The kingdom is vast, spacious, boundless. Jerusalem is as villages *without walls*, for the multitude of people contained therein.

II. Next let me illustrate it with reference to the *love of God*. In all ages, men have been applying the measuring line to the love of God. Go back eighteen centuries, and you find the Pharisees and Scribes busy with the measuring line. They said the love of God was confined to the respectable and the good. There was none to spare for the sinful and the degraded and the outcast. ‘This people,’ they said of the ‘lapsed masses’ of Palestine, ‘this people that knoweth not the law is accursed.’ But Jesus came and repudiated the Pharisaic measuring line. He was the friend of publicans and sinners. He came to seek and save that which was lost. He came to tell the degraded and the hopeless that the love of God reached down even to them. He preached a love that was without limit or bound; a love that was never weary; a love that stooped to the vilest. ‘God so loved the world—the wide, wide world, and every creature in it—God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’

And yet, in spite of the life and witness of Jesus,

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men have not ceased to think God's love can be measured. They have tried to limit it by theological theories. Men preached a hateful theory of election, asserting there were some whom God loved and saved, and some on whom He visited His wrath and damned. They have preached a 'limited atonement,' as if Christ died only for a section of the race, and His blood availed to cleanse but a few. And I do not hesitate to say that that doctrine of election and that doctrine of a limited atonement are a slander and libel upon the love of God. It is vain to apply the measuring rod to the love of God. It spurns all limits; it overflows all boundaries—

‘For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man's mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.’

I know nothing of love for an 'elect few.' My gospel says, 'God so loved the world.' I know nothing of a limited atonement. My gospel says, 'He is the Propitiation for *our* sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.' The love of God knows no limit—it is vast, boundless, infinite. It embraces every man—it endures to all eternity. You may seek with all saints to comprehend what is the length and breadth, the height and depth of the love of God. But your measuring line will give out, and you will confess with the Apostle that it passeth knowledge. The

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love of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ—who shall measure it? It is a vast unfathomable sea, where all our thoughts are drowned.

III. Let me illustrate it further with reference to *man's destiny*. There are those who use the measuring line *to man*. They make him a very paltry and miserable kind of being. The anatomist takes his measuring line, and gives his account of man. What is man? A being made up of flesh and bone and blood, and he will proceed to tell you all about the structure of the body, the function of the blood, the nervous system, and the marvels of the brain. The whole secret of man, according to the anatomist, reveals itself at the touch of the scalpel. If that be all, man is a pitiful kind of being, only a superior animal, and little better than the brute from which he has sprung. But who says that is all? You can use your measuring line to this physical frame, you can tell the number of man's bones, and the ounces of his blood. But man is more than flesh and blood and bone—God breathed into man the breath of life, and he became *a living soul*. A living soul! an infinite, immortal soul. Put your measuring line away! It is useless here! The measuring line has yet to be discovered that can plumb the unfathomable depths of the human soul!

Take up current literature, and it is a poor account of man you get there. It was Swift who set the fashion of talking contemptuously about



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man, when he said man was 'a forked, straddling animal, with bandy legs.' Multitudes of moderns have followed his example, and banish all the wonder and mystery from man. Like Mr. Gradgrind, they treat him as a mere bundle of facts, and reduce him to the level of a machine. But man is more than Mr. Gradgrind would make him out to be ; man is more than a straddling animal without feathers. 'What is man?' 'Thou hast made him a little lower than God.' A little lower than God,—every measuring line fails here. There are heights in man that rise to heaven ; there are deeps in him that sink into hell. He is vast, infinite, incomprehensible, a spirit ; as Carlyle says, an unutterable mystery of mysteries.

What is man to be? Some fond parents take their children to phrenologists, and these good men, after an examination of the children's features and the conformation of their heads, venture to predict what their future will be. 'This boy,' they say, 'will be a lawyer, or a doctor, or a merchant, or a preacher.' That, to say the least, is a very measurable kind of destiny. We can reckon up what that means! But is that the utmost man can hope for? Is it his highest destiny to be a successful merchant, or doctor, or lawyer? Is a little worldly success the best he can aspire to? No, it is not the best and highest we can hope for. There is in store for us not a paltry worldly success, but an immeasurable glory of character ;

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man's destiny is beyond the reach of any earthly measuring line. 'Beloved, now are we children of God, and it doth not *yet appear what we shall be.*' It doth not yet appear what we shall be; the splendour of our destiny is beyond the utmost reach of our imagination and thought, for we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

IV. I had intended illustrating this truth in the last place by a reference to heaven. A word only must suffice. We tax our imaginations to try and picture to ourselves the glory and bliss of heaven. But the measuring line of the human mind is not equal to the task. It exceeds our utmost stretch of thought. John has given us a glowing picture in the Apocalypse. We read of the beautiful city, with its jasper walls and golden streets and sea of glass, and river of life, and throngs of white-robed saints, and our minds are overwhelmed with the excess of glory. But heaven is better even than John's sketch of it. Even his soaring imagination could not take in all its splendour and beauty. Heaven's glory baffles description, defies every measuring line. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the mind of man the things which God hath prepared for those who love Him.'

Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! His goodness far outruns our wildest dreams! May it be ours by

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blessed experience to know that love which stoops to the most vile, and has mercy on every sinner. May it be ours to share in that high destiny reserved for all the children of God! And may it be ours at last to walk with the Lamb in white, and to find that, beautiful and radiant as our thoughts of heaven were, the reality was even better than our best!

## XIV

### ‘The Incomplete Biography’

*‘And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.’—JOHN xxi. 25.*

THESE last two verses appended to John’s Gospel are evidently *not* from the pen of John himself. Bishop Westcott speaks of them as ‘Separate notes which were attached to the Gospel before publication.’ If you will look at verse 24 for a moment, you will see it serves much the same purpose as the witness’s signature does in a legal document. It is a kind of certificate of genuineness. John finished writing at verse 23, and in verse 24 some persons unknown to us, but men of weight and importance in their day—probably some of John’s fellow-Apostles or else the elders of the Church at Ephesus—attest the fact that the Gospel is, shall I say, ‘John’s act and deed,’ and vouch also for the accuracy of its contents. ‘This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true.’

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And this tallies exactly with the traditional account of how the fourth Gospel came to be written. The fourth Gospel was the last of the Gospels in order of time. The Gospels by Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been already some years in existence, and had gained for themselves an established position as authoritative records of the life of Christ. But the story of Jesus as told by the first three evangelists was not a complete biography, it was a mere sketch—the veriest fragment of a life. There were whole sections of the story of Jesus which the synoptists passed over in silence. Nowhere, perhaps, was the incompleteness of the story of Christ, as told by Matthew and Mark and Luke, more clearly recognized and deeply felt than at Ephesus. The Christians at Ephesus had enjoyed the rare privilege of having the beloved Apostle John as their pastor. They had heard him tell of mighty works which Jesus did, and of wonderful discourses which He delivered, of which no mention was made in the existing Gospels. And now that John was getting old, fearing lest these precious recollections of Christ should perish with his death, they began to press him to commit them to writing, so that they might become the Church’s permanent possession.

‘So,’ as the story is told in the Muratorian fragment—an ancient document about the canon of Scripture which dates back to the second century—‘when his fellow-disciples’ (*i.e.* Apostles, of

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whom two or three, Andrew among them, are said to have been living at Ephesus at this time)—‘so when his fellow-disciples and bishops urgently pressed him to write,’ he said, ‘Fast with me from to-day for three days, and let us tell one another any revelation which may be made to us, for or against (the plan of writing ’). On the same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the Apostles, that John should relate all in his own words, and that all should review his writing. So John undertook the task, and produced for us this fourth Gospel—the most sublime book in the world. And then it was submitted for review to Andrew and the rest, and in verse 24 you have their verdict upon it, their testimony to its authenticity and genuineness. ‘This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true.’

Now, the fourth Gospel was meant to supplement the other three—indeed, it *does* supplement them. It takes them for granted. It assumes that its readers are already acquainted with Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It was not John’s intention to go over the ground which the other evangelists had already covered. John’s aim was to give some account of the *inner* life of Christ, and to preserve for the Church some of the incidents in His life, and some of His great discourses which had been overlooked and omitted by the other evangelists. I can imagine with what eager anticipation the Christians

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at Ephesus looked forward to the publication of John's Gospel. I can imagine with what delight and deepening interest Andrew and the rest read it when it was finished. The story of the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, the story of Nicodemus, the story of the Samaritan woman, the sermon on the Good Shepherd, the story of Lazarus, and those imperishable words spoken in the silence of the upper room, were all in it.

And yet when they came to the end of verse 23, mingled with their thankfulness and delight, there was a shade of disappointment. They had hoped that if only John would write down his reminiscences they would have a complete biography of Jesus. But John had said his say, and the *biography was not yet complete*. There were things which Andrew and the others who had been disciples of Christ missed from the story. Even when the account given by the synoptists had been supplemented by John's additions, those who had been personally acquainted with Jesus knew perfectly well ‘the half had not been told.’ So, after testifying that what John said was beautiful and true, so far as it went, they add a little note to warn readers against supposing that it was a complete biography. ‘This,’ they said, ‘is but a fragment. There are also many other things which Jesus did.’

Then, I think, it began to dawn upon them that to write a complete life of Jesus would be a stupendous task—indeed, for any *one* person, an

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*impossible* task! For, to such a complete life, every one who ever came into contact with Jesus would have to contribute his share. For Jesus never came into contact with any one without saying or doing something worth holding in everlasting remembrance. They began to realize that not even the beloved Apostle could put Jesus into a book; that it would require a vast library of books, an innumerable army of books, fully to tell the story of the Saviour's life. ‘There are many other things which Jesus did,’ is their comment on this Gospel. The omissions outnumbered the insertions. What John recorded were only *samples* of the kind of words Jesus used to speak, and the kind of deeds He used to do.

But what else could be expected? Completeness was out of the question when the theme was so exhaustless! To supply the omissions book after book would have to be written. Every one of the twelve, every one of the seventy, Mary, Salome, Lazarus, every one who had ever conversed with Christ, every one who had ever been healed by Him, would have to contribute his or her volume. And as these disciples contemplate it, and think of the thousands and tens of thousands who would have to supply their part towards a complete biography, it seems to them as if the world would not be big enough to hold all the books that would have to be written. ‘There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which,



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if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.’

The incompleteness of John’s account and the exhaustlessness of the theme, those are the two facts set forth in the words of the text.

Now, the words of the text were originally written with reference to the thirty years spent by Jesus in Palestine. To these disciples it seemed impossible to give a complete account of what Jesus said and did even in that short space of time. The impossibility has not grown any less with the years. We have not the same wealth of material at hand for the biography of Christ as these early Christians had. For there were many alive in their day who had talked with the Saviour and known Him. We, on the other hand, have nothing to fall back upon save the fragmentary sketches of Jesus given in the four Gospels. All we shall ever know of His earthly life is contained in four small booklets that do not make a hundred pages between them. Compare the Gospels with famous modern biographies, and you will realize how sketchy the story of Jesus is.

And yet, if there is one thing that we are becoming more and more conscious of every year, it is that the Gospel story is an *exhaustless theme*! ‘Lives of Christ’ are innumerable. Year by year they issue from the press, and the reason for every new life published is that the author thinks he has

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discovered something about Jesus which has not been written in other books. There are biographies of *men* which may be said to be final. They exhaust their subject. They leave nothing further to be said. But ‘the life of Christ’ far transcends anything and everything that has been said about Him. Therefore no life of Christ is complete, satisfying, final. Henry Ward Beecher was among those who undertook to write a ‘Life of Christ.’ He was engaged upon it when his last fatal illness seized him. An English visitor called upon him during his illness, and was shown up into his room. After talking for some little time, the Englishman expressed the hope that Mr. Beecher might be spared to finish the ‘Life of Christ.’ ‘Finish the life of Christ!’ murmured Beecher, ‘finish the life of Christ! Who can finish the life of Christ?’ Yes, preachers have preached, writers have written, upon this subject now for eighteen centuries, but they have not yet ‘finished the life of Christ.’ The theme is an infinite, exhaustless theme; let a man write upon it as fully and carefully as he likes, the verdict passed upon his book will always be this: ‘There are also many other things which Jesus did.’

But the life of Jesus is not confined to those thirty years in Palestine. He did not end His career on that cross. He died and rose again, and for eighteen centuries now Jesus has been alive and at work in the world. In the nature of things

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there can be *no complete biography* of Jesus Christ, for the sufficient reason that His is *an unfinished life*. You can only write a complete biography of a man whose work is done, and whose life is at an end. But you cannot write the complete story of a man who is alive and in the midst of his activities. And that is why the complete story of Jesus Christ cannot be written. *Jesus is not dead!* Behold He is alive for evermore! His life is an unfinished life. The utmost any one can do is to bring the story up to date, and write ‘To be continued’ on the last page.

And what a task, a stupendous, endless task, that would be! The disciples thought of those thirty years Jesus spent in Palestine, and to them the story of the thirty years seemed an endless theme! We have behind us the story, not of thirty, but of nineteen hundred years! Vast as the theme seemed *then*, it has been growing vaster and vaster ever since. I think of those 1900 years, of the sufferings, the triumphs, the achievements, the conquests of Jesus Christ during the centuries, and I am overwhelmed by the boundlessness of the theme, and the disciple’s verdict begins to appear to me, not a poetical hyperbole, not an exaggeration of the imagination, but something like literal fact—that if all the things that Jesus did were written down, the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

I. For in any complete biography of Jesus Christ

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*you would have to write the story of the Christian Church.* The Church is the body of Christ—His hands, His feet, His lips. He is the soul, the life within the body. By the Church Christ speaks, and acts, and works. And just as these bodies of ours are mere inert masses of dead matter—apart from the vital principle, so the Church is impotent and dead apart from Christ. ‘Apart from Me,’ He said Himself, ‘ye can do nothing.’ The achievements and triumphs of the Church are really *the achievements and triumphs of Christ.* Apostles, evangelists, missionaries, martyrs, teachers, pastors—these are but the instruments; the real worker all the time is Christ, and in any complete biography the story of the Church down the centuries must find a place. The first volume of Church history ever written is the volume known to us as the ‘Book of the Acts of the Apostles.’ But that title is misleading. It is not the title its author gave it. The Apostles are not the subject of this book. *Jesus Christ is the subject of it.* As Luke says, in his preface, in his Gospel he had told Theophilus the story of what Jesus *began* to do and to teach until the day in which He was received up. Now he resumed the story where he had left off, and wished to tell Theophilus what Jesus *continued* to do by means of His holy Apostles, and especially Peter and Paul. But the subject is still the same. The Gospel was the ‘Life of Christ,’ vol. i.; this book is the ‘Life of Christ,’ vol. ii. For in all

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the sufferings, labours, and conquest of the early Church, Luke saw Jesus suffering, working, conquering.

No one recognized this more clearly than the Apostles themselves. When the lame man was healed at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, and the crowds gathered together and stared at Peter and John, you remember Peter’s words, ‘Ye men of Israel, why fasten ye your eyes on us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man to walk?’ ‘The credit for this good deed,’ says Peter, ‘does not belong to us. It belongs to Jesus Christ; we are but the instruments. It is “His name” that has made this man strong.’ And what Peter says all the saints of God repeat. They attribute all their constancy, all their faithfulness, all their courage, all their victories—to their Lord. I can hear a sound as the sound of many waters—the apostles, martyrs, prophets, preachers of bygone centuries saying, ‘Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name, give glory.’ They were but the earthen vessels. The excellency of the power was from their Master.

Preachers have upon their shelves scores of volumes on the story of different sections of the Church. These books rejoice in varying titles, but really all the volumes have but one subject, and that is Jesus Christ. In their pages one meets with innumerable names of men who played a large part, but behind them all I see one majestic

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figure working all in all, and that is the figure of Jesus Christ. When I read of faithful martyrs suffering in Nero’s gardens, in Roman amphitheatres, in Alpine valleys, in Spanish dungeons, in Smithfield bonfires, I am reading of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. When I read of the toil and travail of great evangelists and missionaries like Ulfilas among the Goths and Columba among the Picts, and Francis of Assisi in Italy, and Francis Xavier in Japan; and Robert Morrison in China, and John Williams in the South Seas, and David Livingstone in Africa, I am reading of the toil and travail of the Christ. When I read of the triumphs won for the Gospel by great preachers like Chrysostom of Antioch and Ambrose of Milan, and Bernard of Clairvaux, and Hugh Latimer of England, and John Knox of Scotland, and by men like John Wesley and George Whitefield, and Charles Spurgeon, and D. L. Moody in later days, I am reading of the triumphs of Jesus Christ. When I read the stimulating story of Henry Drummond’s work among the students at Edinburgh, and of R. W. Dale’s work in the great metropolis of the Midlands, I felt it was Christ’s story I was reading. It is *Christ* who through the centuries has been working through His faithful servants, and of *His* story theirs must form part.

And when I realize that in *the complete biography* the story of eighteen centuries of Christian devotion and toil must find a place, I begin to feel as these

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disciples did, that the theme is a boundless one, and if all the things that Jesus did are to be written down, the world itself will scarce contain the books that shall be written.

II. But the story of the Church does not complete the biography of Jesus Christ. In a complete biography *you must include the history of philanthropy and self-sacrifice*. It is dangerous, I know, to make sweeping statements; but history will bear me out when I say that our modern philanthropy owes its existence to Jesus Christ. ‘The history of self-sacrifice,’ says Lecky, ‘is the history of Christianity.’ I have a book on my shelves by Loring Brace, an American author, in which he describes the growing humaneness of life in the past eighteen centuries. He shows how the position of woman has been elevated, and children have become the objects of tender and loving care; he shows how piracy, private war, and duelling have been abolished; he shows how the chains have been struck off from the wrists of the slave; he shows how a humane spirit has crept into our laws, and how the course of the centuries has been marked by a growing pity and care for the poor, the orphan, the unfortunate, the lost. And the book in which he tells this wonderful story he entitles *Gesta Christi*—the doings of Christ. Yes, brethren, that is what it is—it is *the Lord’s doing*. The philanthropic and humane enterprises of the past eighteen centuries are ‘the doings of Christ,’

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and in any complete biography they must have their place.

For it is Jesus Christ who has filled men's hearts with the emotions of sympathy, pity, and love, which have sent them forth to engage in service. The story of John Howard and his tireless labour for prison reform is part of the story of Christ. The story of William Wilberforce and his splendid struggle for the freedom of the slave is part of the story of Christ. The story of John Pounds and his work amongst the ragged lads of Portsmouth is part of the story of Christ. The story of Florence Nightingale and her unwearied ministrations to the sick and wounded in the Crimea is part of the story of Christ. The story of Lord Shaftesbury and his life-long devotion to the cause of the children and the poor and the oppressed is part of the story of Christ. The story of Father Damien's work among the lepers of Molokai, and of Sister Dora among the rough men and women of the Black Country, and of Salvation sisters amongst the degraded and the vile in our city slums, is part of the story of Christ. The story of Müller's orphanage and Barnardo's Homes, and the Victoria Hospital is part of the story of Christ. Yes, the story of every refuge and asylum and home would have to find a place in the ‘complete biography’—for they are all *Gesta Christi*, the doings of Christ.

And when I realize that the complete story



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must embrace the history of philanthropy and self-sacrifice, the task, vast before, becomes boundless and limitless, and the words of the disciples seem to be words of soberness and truth—that if all the things which Jesus did were written down, the world itself would not contain the books that should be written.

III. But the story of philanthropy and the story of the Church do not complete the Biography of Christ. In a complete biography you must include *the history of every individual believer*. Imagine the complete story of the Church to be told. Imagine the full history of philanthropy to be written—the result would be an army of volumes no library—no, nor ten thousand libraries—could contain. Life would be far too short to read them. But imagine life prolonged till that vast mass of books had been read, the comment of every Christian believer when his task was completed would be this: ‘There are also many other things which Jesus did,’ for *his own story* would be wanting—the things that Jesus had done for *him*!

Jesus healed many lepers, gave sight to many blind, and hearing to many deaf, besides these whose stories are told for us in the Gospels! And I can imagine one of that unnamed multitude whom Jesus had healed, reading one of these Gospels, and saying, ‘This story is not complete. All Christ’s wonderful works are not here. There are also other things which Jesus did—He healed

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me.’ And so, though you should bring me a complete history of the Church, and a complete history of philanthropy, my comment would be, ‘This is not the complete account. There are many other things which Jesus did. *My* story is not in this volume. Jesus found *me* smitten with the leprosy of sin, and He made *me* clean. Jesus found *me* in rags in the far country, and brought me home. Jesus found *me* bound in affliction and iron, and set me free. Jesus found *me* dead in trespasses and sins, and raised me to life again. Jesus has done more than is credited to Him here. He has done more than save Mary and the penitent thief, and Augustine and John Bunyan, and John Newton. He saved *me*. The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me. And you must tell *my* story before you can give a complete account of what Jesus did.’ Every believer can say that. Jesus has done His mighty works upon us. We have each of us a chapter to supply for the biography of Christ, and till each believer has written down what the Lord has done for *his* soul, the biography is still incomplete.

And when I remember that those whom Christ has redeemed are a multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and peoples, and kindreds, and tongues, it seems to me that if the things which Jesus did should be written down every one, the world itself would not contain the books that should be written.

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And yet this life will be completed some day, for the old Book speaks about the ‘coming of the end, when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father.’ The history of Christ’s redemptive work will then be complete, and you can write ‘Finis’ at the end of it. Brethren, in that complete biography shall you and I find a place? To complete it, must it have chapters declaring what Christ has done for us? Or will it be complete without us? Brethren, our eternal destiny hangs on our answer to that question—for that complete biography is the Lamb’s Book of Life, and into heaven ‘there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie; but only they which are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.’

## XV

### ‘John Mark’

Mark xiv. 51 ; Acts xiii. 13 ; Acts xv. 37, 38 ; 2 Tim. iv. 11.

I HAVE quoted in those verses practically all the New Testament has to say about Mark. It amounts, as you will have noticed, only to some half-dozen verses altogether. But in those half-dozen verses—in a few bold strokes—the character of John Mark is clearly and distinctly outlined. It is to the character of John Mark, as these verses reveal it to us, that I wish to call your attention.

I. *The young man with the linen cloth.*—I believe the first reference to John Mark is to be found in the story of the young man who followed Christ on that tragic night when He was being led from Gethsemane’s garden to the high priest’s judgment hall. The circumstances were these: Christ, you remember, had been seized by the emissaries of the priests, led by the traitor Judas, among the olives of Gethsemane. He was being taken with considerable uproar and tumult through the streets of Jerusalem to the high priest’s palace. Startled by the tumult and the flash of lanterns at

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than the young man had bargained for. His indignant sympathy with the prisoner pretty quickly simmered down when he felt the grip of the soldiers’ hands upon his own arms. Giving up any idea of interfering on behalf of Jesus, he made up his mind to save himself. By a sudden wrench he extricated himself from the grip of his captors, and leaving the linen cloth he had thrown around him in their hands, he fled, naked, and was soon lost to sight in the deep darkness.

Now, who was this young man? Several guesses have been made at his identity, one of the most ingenious being that of Dr. Watson, who contends that he was Lazarus. But in all probability, in this little incident, Mark is telling a story about himself. Indeed, so many lines of argument combine to point to Mark, that the conjecture seems to me to become almost a certainty. Let me tell you in a few words why I think this young man was none other than Mark himself.

(1) This way of referring to himself is quite in keeping with the manner of the Gospel narrative. In the Gospel that goes by his name, John speaks of many incidents in which he himself took part. But he never mentions himself directly by name. He speaks of himself, as it were, half-shyly—as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved,’ or ‘the other disciple.’ For instance, in the very first chapter, he tells us of a visit paid to Jesus by two of the Baptist’s disciples. Now we know for a practical

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midnight, the inhabitants of the streets through which the procession passed got up to see what was the matter. Some not only got up, but went out.

Among others who did this was a young man whom the Evangelist does not trouble to name more specifically. He heard the uproar, jumped out of bed, seized the first article of clothing that lay handy, and rushed out into the open street. The cause of the tumult was not difficult to discover. He saw that a prisoner, surrounded by a mob, armed with swords and staves, was being led away to judgment. A second glance showed him that the prisoner was none other than Jesus, the man about whom all Jerusalem was talking, the preacher to whom he, along with thousands more, had listened with such keen delight as He taught in the Temple. Wishing to know what Jesus had done, and where they were taking Him to, the young man followed in the crowd, keeping as near to Jesus as he could. On the way he saw one of the soldiers offer insult to Jesus—he saw the brute spit in the prisoner’s face. At once the young man’s blood was up. ‘Shame!’ he cried, in a blaze of indignation. This cry attracted the soldiers’ attention to him. ‘Surely,’ shouted the ruffian, whose brutal act provoked his interference, ‘Surely this man also is one of them,’ and with that they proceeded to lay hands upon the young man, meaning to drag him off along with Jesus. But to stand alongside of Jesus in the dock was more

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certainty that John was one of the two. But he never mentions himself. All he says is: ‘One of the two that heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother,’ leaving us to infer that he himself was the other one. That is the manner of the Evangelists when they speak of themselves—they do so obliquely, vaguely, shyly. And for Mark to speak of himself in this way ‘as a certain young man’ is in strict accord with Gospel usage.

(2) The very triviality of the incident seems to point to Mark as the young man concerned. This incident has little or no bearing upon the story. It does not affect Christ’s fortunes in the least. Why is it that this trivial and almost paltry little episode is inserted, while other and important events are omitted? Well, I can only account for it on the supposition that this little incident had some strong personal interest for the writer of the Gospel. In itself, I repeat, the event is exceedingly trivial. But if Mark was the young man concerned, it was far from being trivial to him. The act that brought him into contact with Jesus Christ would be to him, at any rate, of supreme interest and importance. I can understand the insertion of this little story if Mark was the young man referred to; but if not, I am at a loss to explain why the incident is recorded at all.

(3) Further, the minuteness of the story inevitably suggests that the Evangelist is here giving

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us a bit of his own history. Read the two verses, and you will find they are full of minute and vivid touches that make the picture live before us. We can see it all : the young man’s hurried rush, lightly clad, into the street ; his indignant interference, his sudden flight. But the minuteness comes out specially clearly in the Greek word translated ‘linen cloth.’ The Evangelist specifies a particular kind of linen cloth—a *sindon*, a fine and very costly web, so called because woven in Scinde, in India. It was a kind of linen cloth greatly valued, possessed only by the rich, and made use of by them especially as ‘winding sheets.’ That the writer should specify in this way, should be so minute and exact, and should crowd so much detail into the account—all this suggests that he is writing of what happened to himself.

(4) Further, what we know about the Evangelist’s circumstances favours the idea that this young man was Mark himself. We know from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles that John Mark’s mother lived in Jerusalem. It is quite possible that her house may have been in one of the streets along which Jesus was led. From the Acts we know, further, that this house of Mark’s mother was large and spacious enough to accommodate the prayer meetings of the early Church. We naturally infer that people who live in large houses have large incomes, and so we conclude that Mark’s mother must have been a woman of some means. This



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supposition is confirmed by the fact that we know that one of her connections—her cousin Barnabas—was a landed proprietor and a rich man. You will perhaps ask, ‘What does it matter whether Mark’s mother was rich or not?’ Well, it matters just this much—it accounts for the *sindon*, that costly linen cloth. As I have already said, such a cloth would only be likely to be found in the homes of the rich. But if Mary, Mark’s mother, was a woman of means, we can understand how it came to pass that it was a *sindon* in which Mark hurriedly wrapped himself on that never-to-be-forgotten night. It is a small point, but it helps to make the theory intelligible and consistent. I am going to assume, then, that this young man was none other than Mark himself. This, then, is our first introduction to him. And on his first introduction Mark reveals his character as a man of fine impulses, of generous enthusiasms, but lacking in steadfast and resolute courage.

II. *Mark in Pamphylia*.—But before I make my comments on this aspect of Mark’s character, let me pass on to the second New Testament reference to him. I do not know whether Mark was a Christian when that midnight adventure of which we have spoken took place. But if he was not one then, he must have become one soon after. Mark’s relatives, indeed, were prominent in the little Church at Jerusalem. His mother did the ‘Lady Bountiful,’ and opened her house for

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the prayer meetings of the Church. His uncle Barnabas was, perhaps, the best known and most highly esteemed member of the Church, next to the Apostles themselves. And Mark himself was a member, and, indeed, was looked upon as a young man full of promise. It is no matter for surprise, therefore, to find that when Barnabas and Paul were setting out for their first missionary journey, and were discussing together what young man they should take with them as their minister, that Barnabas should at once think of his nephew, John Mark. ‘Mark,’ said he to Paul, ‘is the very man for us.’

Paul accepted Barnabas’ recommendation, and John Mark was invited to accompany them on the tour. He accepted the invitation with alacrity. His missionary zeal, indeed, knew no bounds, and when the missionaries left Antioch, you would have said John Mark was far and away the most enthusiastic of the party. The first place they visited was Cyprus, and there they enjoyed the favour of the governor, Sergius Paulus, and Mark’s enthusiasm for missions kept up at boiling-point. But from Cyprus they sailed to Asia, and landing at Perga, Paul and Barnabas determined to cross the Taurus range of mountains and strike inland. It happened, however, that not only were these mountains rough and toilsome to cross, but they had a bad reputation as being infested with brigands and outlaws. The missionaries were now coming

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face to face with some of the difficulties and dangers incident to their work. They were about to experience perils of water, and perils of robbers. And at the prospect of danger Mark's enthusiasm began to simmer down. He began to feel he had had enough of missionary work. He suddenly remembered that his mother, in Jerusalem, wanted him home again. So, in spite of the protests of Paul, and the appeals of Barnabas, ‘he departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.’

Now, you will notice it is exactly the same John Mark who is revealed to us by the Pamphylian incident, and the midnight episode in the streets of Jerusalem. The John Mark who, frightened of the dangers of the Pamphylian mountains, returned home to his mother, is exactly the same John Mark who, when he found his championship of Christ's cause brought him into trouble, left the linen cloth in the soldiers' hands, and fled naked. What exactly is the manner of man which the two incidents reveal? Well, they reveal to us a man full of *generous impulse*, but lacking in courage; a young man soon hot, and soon cold again; a young man eager to undertake Christian work, but who when persecution arose on account of the Word, is immediately offended. That is John Mark as these two incidents reveal him to us. On the impulse of the moment he rushes to the help of Christ, but runs away when threatened with

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imprisonment himself. In a fit of enthusiasm he volunteers for the mission field, but at the first sign of danger he returns home to his mother.

Look, then, for a moment, at this enthusiastic but inconstant man. For his enthusiasm I have nothing but praise. Let fools scoff at enthusiasm and sneer at zeal. I only lament that there is so little of either. I admire the generous enthusiasm of this young man that made him stand up for Christ when Christ was lonely and a prisoner. I admire the flaming zeal that made him volunteer for the mission field. Would to God, brethren, there was a little more enthusiasm, a little more zeal, amongst us for Christ and His work! We have plenty of enthusiasm for other things. I know scores of young men who are enthusiastic, passionately enthusiastic, enthusiastic almost to the verge of lunacy, over their sports, their cricket, their football, their cycling, and so on. I know business men who are enthusiastic and zealous beyond words in the matter of money-making. They are prodigal of labour and pains, they think no hours too long in their effort to make a fortune.

But, as a rule, we are not over-enthusiastic for Christ and His work.

An extravagant zeal is certainly not the besetting sin of the average Christian. In work for Christ, at any rate, we act on the principle of doing nothing excessive or extravagant. Our moderation is known unto all men. And we are languishing to-day, we

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are ineffective and impotent to-day, because of this very coldness and lack of zeal. The Church is being strangled by her respectability. Would to God, brethren, that there were amongst us as Christian people and Christian workers more of the headlong, generous enthusiasm we see in the conduct of Mark! A rash enthusiasm is better than a cold respectability that never ventures and never dares. This is one of the Church’s urgent and clamant needs. We want earnestness, we want zeal, we want enthusiasm, we want fire. If we only put into our religion the enthusiasm we put into our politics, our pleasures, our business, I venture to assert that the twentieth century would not be a decade old before the kingdoms of the world had become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

For Mark’s enthusiasm I have nothing but praise. But while his enthusiasm is wholly admirable, yet Mark’s conduct teaches us to beware of trusting to merely generous impulses and passing emotions. That is the especial danger of what I may call *emotional* religion. Dr. Horton said the other day that he grew to distrust more and more appeals to the feelings. Perhaps, in the way he stated it, I do not quite agree with him. But I do agree that feeling alone furnishes no stable foundation for a religious life. Often when the feelings are touched there is a magnificent outburst of enthusiasm. But the conscience has not been convinced, the reason

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has not been won, the will has not been surrendered, with the result that when the emotion passes the enthusiasm passes too. Generous impulses, a fit of enthusiasm, are not sufficient to carry a man through life ; at any rate, through the Christian life. Enthusiasm has a trick of evaporating in face of difficulties. To live the Christian life, in addition to enthusiasm, we must have unshakable convictions, we must be men of rock-like steadfastness.

You will remember that Jesus pictures, in one of His inimitable parables, the man whose religion is a matter of emotion and impulse. It is John Mark's picture to the life. This kind of man, when he hears the Word, ‘ straightway with joy receiveth it.’ There you have the outburst of enthusiasm. But it is not all plain sailing in the Christian life. Difficulties soon come. What then? Well, listen. ‘ When persecution or trouble ariseth because of the Word, straightway he is offended.’ We all have known men of that sort. John Bunyan has filled out the picture in his character of Temporary, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. We have all met Temporary. We saw him at the recent mission. In answer to the missionary's appeal, he went into the inquiry-room. He was brimming over with zeal and emotion and earnest feeling that night, but in a week the emotion passed, and we saw him no more.

But the men Christ wants are not Temporaries who will run away at the first approach of danger ; He wants those who will endure firm and steadfast

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and true, right to the end. He wants those who can ask that searching question, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword,’ and who can answer in the words of the Apostle, ‘Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.’ Those are the men Christ wants—faithful men, loyal men, standfast men ; men who will die, but never surrender ; men who will go to prison and to death, but never deny Him ; men whose enthusiasm shall not be like the flame of straw—one fierce blaze and over—but as the flame of the house fire, ever steadily and brightly burning. And to have this steadfastness, not only must our feelings be touched, but our *wills* must be surrendered, and our whole nature changed.

This quality of *steadfastness* Christ insists upon. More than one man came to Him in a fit of enthusiasm, and the Master at once faced them with the difficulties and the trials of the Christian life. A man, for instance, came to Him one day, and said, ‘Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.’ And Christ said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.’ He wants men to know what they are undertaking. He bids every man ‘sit down and count the cost, . . . to see whether he will be able to finish it.’ For He does not want men who will follow Him to-day

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and desert Him to-morrow. He wants steadfast men—men who will be faithful to Him, even unto death. Look into your hearts just now and see how things stand there. Have you surrendered heart and will and all to Jesus Christ? You young beginners, how is it faring with you? You were in the seventh heaven some months ago! Where are you to-day? As the excitement has cooled down, has your devotion to Jesus disappeared also? Are there some John Marks in this congregation to-night—men and women, young men and young women, who draw back to the perdition of their souls! Oh, stand fast in the Lord, dearly beloved; and the only way to stand fast in Him is to surrender everything to Him, to give the will and the life to Him. And this I say for the warning of those of you who trust to periodic outbursts of emotion. He that endureth to the end, he shall be saved.

III. In the third reference, we see this generous but unstable Mark has become a cause of dissension between two good men. It seems that Mark offered himself a second time for foreign missionary work. Barnabas, his uncle, was willing to take him. But Paul, after his last experience of Mark, distinctly refused to take the runaway with them a second time. I am not going to stay to ask who was right. There is much to say for Paul's action; for the second missionary journey which had been mapped out was to take them back again to those



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dangerous regions which they had visited before, and what guarantee had they that Mark would not turn faint-hearted and run away again? And there is much, perhaps even more, to say for Barnabas, who pleaded that Mark might be given a second chance.

But dismissing the rights and wrongs of the dispute, this is the point to notice—Mark became a bone of contention between Paul and Barnabas, contention so sharp that these two bosom friends and fellow workers parted asunder the one from the other. Yes, there was a breach of friendship between Paul and Barnabas, and this unstable, unreliable Mark was the occasion of it. Upon which I will make but one remark—that unstable, inconstant, unreliable men of this type always do create dissension. Men who blow hot and cold invariably cause division and strife. Men are never sure of them; they do not know what to think of them. Some take one view, and some another. Mr. Facing-Both-Ways is a certain source of trouble, and over inconstant and unstable disciples good men still quarrel and fall out. Brethren, let us ask God for grace to be straightforward, brave and true, that we may never by our inconstancy and weakness cause strife and difference among the people of God.

IV. And now let me say a word about the last notice we have of Mark. In the one we have just considered, Paul refused to have Mark for a companion.

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Was John Mark, then, a castaway? Did he fail of the grace of God? Was the fate of Bunyan's Mr. Temporary, John Mark's fate? No, brethren, John Mark was no castaway, but by the grace of God he developed into a brave and faithful soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ. It cut him to the quick that Paul should doubt him, but he did not give up his idea of being a missionary because Paul would not take him as his companion. He went into the field with Barnabas, and though the history does not give us details, we know that, in the course of years, out of weakness Mark became strong. The unstable, unreliable, inconstant man, by the discipline of the years, became a faithful, steadfast disciple.

Paul noted the change, and here in my last reference the same Paul who had carried his protest against Mark's cowardice so far as to break with Barnabas, his bosom friend, sends for Mark to come to him. ‘Take Mark,’ he writes to Timothy, ‘and bring him with you, for he is profitable to me for ministering.’ The man whom once Paul discarded as useless and worthless he sends for now as being *profitable* to him for ministering. I think of all people no one rejoiced over the change in Mark more than Paul himself. I can imagine him saying when they met, ‘Forgive me that I doubted thee;’ and if I know anything of human nature, Mark's cup of joy was full when Paul placed his confidence in him once

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again, and sent for him. For the mere sending for him just then argued boundless confidence in John Mark’s courage and devotion. For Paul was in prison in Rome, and the end was near. Rats leave a sinking ship, they say, and fair weather friends had been leaving Paul until only Luke was left to stand by him. It was under those circumstances that Paul sent for Mark, and it argues immense confidence in John Mark’s courage to believe he would be ready to come.

This John Mark, ready to stand by Paul’s side in Rome at the risk of imprisonment, and even of death, is a very different man from the John Mark who ran away from Pamphylia. Different, and yet the same. By the grace of God he had been made anew, the strain of weakness had been eradicated, the worthless became profitable, the fickle steadfast, the coward a hero. Yes, the Jesus who took hold of Peter the blasphemer, and turned him into Peter the man of rock ; the Jesus who took hold of Saul the persecutor, and changed him into Paul the Apostle ; the Jesus who took hold of Onesimus the thief, and turned him into Onesimus the brother, took hold of this timid, unreliable, inconstant Mark, and changed him into a faithful man and a brave disciple. In Cyprus, in Colosse, in Rome, Mark witnessed a good confession, and at last laid down his life for Christ in the streets of Alexandria. Mark’s symbol in art is the lion. Had you seen him in Pamphylia you would

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have said the timid hare would have been an **apter** symbol ; but the old artists judged rightly. This man who ran away from the work became in process of time a perfect lion in courage and dauntless bravery.

And the lesson of quite infinite encouragement from the contemplation of Mark's history is that the weak may become strong, the unstable constant, the coward brave. There are those here who have been cowards like John Mark was ; we are ourselves John Bunyan's Mr. Temporaries ; we have deserted our Master in time of trouble ; we have run away when danger threatened ; we have denied Him and betrayed Him, and sold Him again and again. That is so, is it not ? We know our weakness and cowardice, and are ashamed of it ! Deserters from the army of earthly monarchs are shot without mercy ! But God is always ready to give us a second chance—He is always ready to *restore* us ! None of us, therefore, need despair. We, too, like John Mark, out of weakness can be made strong. Frail and inconstant though we be, the hand that made the impulsive Peter a rock man, the hand that made the runaway John Mark a brave martyr, that same hand will make us steadfast, and set us at last perfect before the throne. Beaten, baffled, defeated, we may yet be amongst those who overcome. Christ can lay hold of the veriest coward, the greatest craven, in this church to-night, and make him a very lion for courage,

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and set him at last among princes, and make him inherit a throne of glory.

Will you try Him? I speak to the fallen and the hopeless. To those in the horrible pit and miry clay of despair. To those who have failed again, and again, and again, and have no hope left in them. Will you try Him, brethren? Memories of cowardice and failure and treachery come crowding in upon you. Yet be not discouraged. *Sursum corda!* There are those before the throne to-night who failed, and fell, and denied, and blasphemed, and betrayed their Lord. But to-night they hold the palm of triumph in their hands, and wear a crown of victory upon their brows. Will you try Him? You will find His grace sufficient. Take the grace Christ offers, the help He gives, and however weak you may have been in past days, you will be able to say, with the Apostle, ‘Thanks be to God, Who always maketh us to triumph in Christ.’

‘Strong in the Lord of Hosts,  
And in His mighty power,  
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts,  
Is more than conqueror.’

**THE END**











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